

# The Concept of Implementation

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## Introduction\*

Implementation analysis appears to promise that rare combination of rigorous methodology and social relevance so often sought in policy analysis. In theory, implementation analysis seems to offer not just evaluation techniques for the assessment of public program performance but also guidance if not rules for the successful attainment of policy objectives. In a seminal article, typical of the state of implementation analysis, P. Sabatier and D. Mazmanian ventured to state conditions for the accomplishment of a policy objective or "effective implementation" (Sabatier & Mazmanian 1979). Implementation analysis would, if its potential is realized, take policy analysis further than evaluation research (ER) or social impact analysis (SIA); as opposed to the narrow focus of traditional public administration on program execution, implementation analysis would not only highlight the extent to which the policy objectives had been attained but would also come up with directives to planners and policy-makers as to how they should mould their program in order to achieve "effective implementation" (Hargrove).

In the introduction to the volume *Studying Implementation* (1982) W. Williams goes as far as to state that "the primary criterion for the worth of implementation studies is policy relevance" (Williams 1982:1). However, some words of warning against excessive optimism about implementation analysis would not be out of place if they were to result in a realistic understanding of the difficulties involved in doing implementation analysis,

while at the same time such an understanding in turn may rescue the concept of implementation from the narrowly pessimistic notion that implementation analysis cannot be anything but evolution analysis.

## Distinction between statics and dynamics

It seems that the concept of implementation belongs to a set of concepts which is characterized by a *surface clarity* but at the same time comprises a *problematic deep structure*. Webster's Dictionary (1971) states that "implementation" means the act of implementing or the state of being implemented, and it presents the following key words for "implement":

"to carry out: accomplish, fulfill; to give practical effect to and ensure of actual fulfillment by concrete measures; to provide instruments or means of practical expression for . . ."

"To carry out something" or "to accomplish something" may sound intelligible and require little explication. A formal definition might be:

DEF. Implementation = F (Intention, Output, Outcome)

where, of course, the process of implementation refers to the bringing about of outcomes that are *congruent* with the original intention(s) by means of outputs.

However, once one starts to analyze the definition the number of relevant and troublesome questions is practically without end: what is implemented? who implements what? who does whoever-it-is implement what? to whom has whoever-it-is implemented what and why? with what has whoever-it-is implemented what to whomever-it-is? etc. These questions only refer to the

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variables of a complete implementation proposition, and they may be augmented by the addition of questions pertaining to the meaning of "implementation" in the sense of "carry out" or "accomplish". To put the matter differently: what state of affairs would be regarded as *non-implementation*? It seems to be the case that various criteria may be employed in order to measure the effectiveness of implementation; thus, non-implementation may not be easily detected or it may be too easily detected. It is simply not clear what non-implementation stands for: program malfunctioning, causal ineffectiveness, failure to achieve goals, the bringing about of unintended outcomes or the accomplishment of dysfunctional goals.

Obviously, to give practical effect to something or to ensure the actual fulfillment of something may be a very simple thing to observe, but when the something to be accomplished is a *policy* or a set of political decisions that which is to be carried out may have an extremely intricate structure. There are actually a number of difficult theoretical and conceptual problems involved in the simple implementation equation introduced above when it is a matter of identifying policy objectives, measuring outcomes and defining a relationship between outputs, outcomes and objectives. A public policy is a binary entity (objectives, outputs), the occurrence of which takes place in an environment which may be analyzed in terms of outcomes. Implementation analysis focuses on the operation of a public policy and its consequences and it includes logically three separate activities:

- (a) clarification of the objectives involved (*the goal function*)
- (b) statement of the relationship between outputs and outcomes in terms of causal effectiveness (*the causal function*)
- (c) clarification of the relation between objectives and outcomes in order to affirm the extent of goal achievement (*the accomplishment function*)

Each of the three tasks of implementation analysis present their own peculiar difficulties; together they imply that it is difficult to judge the effectiveness of implementation and thus arrive at recommendations about what measures are conducive to successful implementation; in any case, these three tasks should be kept clearly separate.

In order to illuminate some basic problems in

implementation research I will try to state the logical structure of a complete implementation proposition. Before embarking on this task let me introduce a fundamental distinction that is germane to much of the thinking about policy implementation. I wish to distinguish sharply between two equally valid questions about implementation, the *static* problem and the *dynamic* problem:

- (1) What state of affairs must obtain in order for the concept of implementation to apply? Or, put differently, when is it accurate to state about a policy that it has been implemented?
- (2) How is implementation brought about? Or: what are the typical properties of processes of implementation?

The static aspect of the concept of implementation deals with the identification of a policy, a set of outcomes and the relationship(s) between these two entities. The dynamic aspect of the concept of implementation refers to the process of implementation, how policies are carried out in an environment conducive to policy accomplishment or policy failure – what is usually referred to as stages of implementation (Mazmanian & Sabatier 1983).

#### The static aspect of implementation

Policy and outcome appear to be the keystones in an implementation proposition. Thus, we have:

DEF. "X implements Z" =<sub>def.</sub>

"X brings about outcome Z which is a policy objective"

Successful implementation does not only require a state of affairs in which there is a policy objective and an outcome (or several objectives or outcomes) for, in addition, the concept of implementation implies that these two entities – objective and outcome – satisfy two different relationships: the causal function and the accomplishment function. Two ideas are fundamental to the concept of implementation: that the policy program is the output that brings about the outcomes (the causal function) in such a way that the outcomes accomplish the objectives of the policy (the accomplishment function). It is vital to make a distinction between these two relationships, because they present different analysis problems. Let us begin with the accomplishment function.

*The Wildavsky Problem*

Successful implementation requires that the objective(s) and the outcome(s) satisfy the requirements of a very special relationship with each other: what is implemented is an objective (intention) that *exists before* the outcome and implementation is the process of effecting an outcome that is the realization of the objective, i.e., the outcome that comes about as a function of the implementation is the objective which means that the objective *exists after* the implementation. This sounds like a *contradictio in adiecto*. A. Wildavsky has dealt with this problem under the heading of “the chicken and the egg” in a few implementation studies like *Implementation* (with J. Pressman) and “Implementation as evolution” (with G. Majone). The following two quotations illustrate his line of thought:

“... the attempt to study implementation raises the most basic question about the relation between thought and action: How can ideas manifest themselves in a world of behavior?” (Wildavsky 1978, p. 103)

“A verb like ‘implement’ must have an object like ‘policy’. But policies normally contain both goals and the means for achieving them. How, then, do we distinguish between a policy and its implementation? In everyday discourse we use policy (when referring to decisions) in several strikingly different ways. Sometimes policy means a statement of intention . . . Other times we speak of policy as if it were equivalent to actual behavior . . . Both these meanings of policy rule out the possibility of studying implementation . . . We can work neither with a definition of policy that excludes any implementation nor one that includes all implementation.” (Wildavsky 1973, pp. xiii–xiv)

There seems to be a real dilemma here: policy involves ends and means and implementation is the employment of the means to achieve the ends, yet policy is to be something that is separate from implementation! How is the distinction between policy and implementation, so crucial in implementation analysis, to be preserved using a means-end terminology?

In order to solve the Wildavsky problem a distinction between two dimensions in an implementation phenomenon has to be introduced: the intentional dimension and the behavioral dimension to be denoted by “i” and “a” (actual level) respectively. If this distinction is accepted it becomes possible to distinguish between intended ends – “end<sub>i</sub>” – and accomplished or actual ends – “end<sub>a</sub>”; moreover, a similar distinction – means<sub>i</sub> and means<sub>a</sub> – may be made. Thus, we arrive at Diagram 1.

Before going into the implications of the Diagram for the Wildavsky problem the key words in the Diagram should be defined formally: an end<sub>i</sub> is any behavior or state such as an actor – an individual or an organized collectivity – conceives it which the actor *wants* to bring about. A means<sub>i</sub> is any behavior such as the actor perceives it and *wants* to perform in order to accomplish an end. What is denoted by these words, “end<sub>i</sub>” and “means<sub>i</sub>” are intentional objects. “Means-end relationship<sub>i</sub>” stands for a belief on the part of the actor, the belief that if means<sub>i</sub> is accomplished then that will imply the accomplishment of an end<sub>i</sub>. Such beliefs in means-end connections may integrate a number of ends. It is often pointed out in policy analysis that the distinction between means and ends is a relative one in the sense that

Diagram 1. *Dimensions of Implementation*

Behavior Level (Actual Level)	Intentional Level		
	Means <sub>i</sub>	End <sub>i</sub>	Means-End Relationship <sub>i</sub>
Means <sub>a</sub>	Realized Means		
Ends <sub>a</sub>		Realized End	
Means-End Relationship <sub>a</sub>			Integrated Means-End Action

an end in its turn can be a means to another end, etc. The Simon concepts of a means-end chain and of a means-end hierarchy cover such phenomena (Simon 1976), which may be analyzed in the same manner in terms of the distinctions in the Diagram. The words "end<sub>a</sub>" and "means<sub>a</sub>" refer to actual objects, to states or behaviors or simply to behavior, whereas a means-end relationship<sub>a</sub> is an actual causal relationship between the end and the means, not simply a perceived relationship.

Thus, in order to introduce a sharp distinction between policy and implementation, policy may be approached as a combination of a means<sub>i</sub> and end<sub>i</sub> and a means-end relationship<sub>i</sub>, whereas implementation may be analyzed as a combination of means<sub>a</sub> and end<sub>a</sub> and a means-end relationship<sub>a</sub>. Suppose an actor has a policy: the fact that something is called an "end" signifies that the actor wants to accomplish this (end<sub>i</sub>) and the fact that something is called a "means" conveys the idea that the actor wants to bring this about in order to arrive at something else, the end (means<sub>i</sub>). The success of this effort depends on there being regardless of what the actor wants or believes a corresponding end<sub>a</sub> to the end<sub>i</sub> and a corresponding means<sub>a</sub> to means<sub>i</sub> and that the means<sub>a</sub> is conducive to the achievement of end<sub>a</sub>, i.e. a means-end relationship<sub>a</sub> corresponds to a means-end relationship<sub>i</sub>. If these conditions are fulfilled – which is certainly not always the case – the policy has been implemented. The concepts introduced in the Diagram may be employed to state a formal definition of the concept of successful implementation: let policy objectives = means<sub>i</sub> and ends<sub>i</sub>, let policy outputs = means<sub>a</sub> and outcomes = ends<sub>a</sub>; then, the accomplishment function requires that the following relations are satisfied:

- (i) means<sub>a</sub> = means<sub>i</sub>
- (ii) ends<sub>a</sub> = ends<sub>i</sub>.

Moreover, the causal function requires that a third relationship is satisfied:

- (iii) means-end relationship<sub>a</sub>  
= means-end relationship<sub>i</sub>

The concept of successful implementation may be regarded as an ideal construct as it may be instrumental rather in detecting the deviations from the three requirements. It is hardly likely that outcomes will perfectly accord with the goals or that the outputs will in effect be as instrumental as

was originally hoped for. The concept of successful implementation may be just as useful analytically even if it is regarded only as a regulative notion (Nakamura & Smallwood 1980).

This conceptualization introduced in Diagram 1 solves the Wildavsky problem as policy is different from implementation, policy comes before implementation and implementation may be evaluated in terms of the policy afterwards. The lesson to be learned from this conceptual exercise is that when considering any reform or major political decision it is essential to differentiate between the stated intentions and what was actually put into practice. It is one thing to derive articulate means-end chains from governmental policy sources and quite a different thing to pin down what actual means were employed to what effect. Implementation analysis covers both dimensions, *policy objectives* and *policy practices*.

#### *The policy formator and the policy implementor*

The ends and means – the intentions – of policies are formulated and enacted by various kinds of actors in the political process. What is an end<sub>i</sub> or a means<sub>i</sub> is an intentional object *to* some actor, which means that any complete implementation proposition must specify the actors involved in the process. These actors may be divided into two sets, the formators and the implementors. Thus, we arrive at:

DEF. Implementation = F (Policy, Outcome, Formator, Implementor)

The idea is implicit in implementalist theory that the actors who decide on policy are different from the actors that are responsible for the implementation of policy. The implementation process is built up around an asymmetric relationship between the formators of policy and the implementors of policy. The formators may not be the initiators of policy; be that as it may, the theory of implementation assumes that public policy becomes a legitimate concern for implementors once it has been decided upon in formally defined ways. It is accepted that the formators and the implementors may be either national, regional or local bodies (Diagram 2). Thus, we have:

Diagram 2. *Implementation Relationships*

Formator \ Implementor			
	National Level	Regional Level	Local Level
National Level	Case I	Case II	Case III
Regional Level		Case IV	Case V
Local Level			Case VI

The standard distinction between a policy formator and enactor on the one hand and a policy implementor on the other is related to an assumption about a typical pattern of the division of authority. It seems counterintuitive to admit the possibility that regional or local governments may set the directives which the national government is instructed to implement.

It must, however, be emphasized that there are two different problems involved here, which should be kept separate: (i) whether an organizational unit placed at a lower level could ever be the formator of a policy to be implemented by an organizational unit placed at a higher level, and (ii) whether authority is the typical or necessary relation between the formator and the implementor, which could be either of these kinds of units. The distinctions introduced in Diagram 2 imply that the answer to the first problem is negative, but the second problem appears to be an open question.

It is often assumed that the concept of implementation implies a concept of authority, as the implementation process is modeled as a one-way interaction in which one set of actors communicates to another set of actors that something is to be done – directives for action which the latter group obey. Actually, the implementation relation appears to satisfy some of the characteristics of authority structures as listed by H. Eckstein and T. R. Gurr in their *Patterns of Authority* (1975):

- (a) asymmetry
- (b) superordination or subordination
- (c) the communication of orders or directives for action (Eckstein & Gurr 1975:22-3).

Whereas (a) and (c) are certainly present in the implementation relationship it is doubtful

whether (b) is a *necessary* element in implementation. Obviously, a great deal of implementation literature has focussed upon the capacity of policy-makers in formally specified authority structures to have subordinate actors implement reforms (Rodgers and Bullock 1972 and 1976, Murphy 1971, McLaughlin 1975, Jones 1975). Moreover, the relationship between formator and implementor has been modeled on the basis of the autonomy of the implementor. E. Farrar, J. DeSanctis and D.K. Cohen distinguish between three models of the implementation interaction:

- (a) a center-to-periphery process
- (b) a bi-lateral process
- (c) a multi-lateral process (pp. 1-2)

The center-to-periphery model comes close to Wildavsky's control model (Wildavsky 1977, p. 105-107), as both include elements of a simple rational decision model:

- (i) unambiguous policy goals
- (ii) clear and predictable technology, i.e., the means-end hierarchy is integrated and reliable
- (iii) simple enforcement rules between the formator and enactor of policy (superordinate) and the implementor (subordinate).

The severe criticism levelled at the applicability of a simple rational decision model to organizational choice (March & Simon, Cyert & March, Lindblom) has led, naturally, to scholars formulating alternative models of implementation. The authors of "Alternative Conceptions of Implementation" contrast the center-to-periphery model with a multi-lateral model, which happens to coincide with Wildavsky's interaction model (Wildavsky 1978, pp. 107-108):

"From the center, the periphery is a collection of hurdles and obstacles blocking the federal government's programs, plans and priorities. But at the periphery, the center's programs, plans, and priorities are a minor distraction in a riot of competing concerns: immediate agreements, responsibilities, and on-going relationships. At the center, the programs, plans, and priorities are the chief concern, but at the periphery, they are a dull background noise which captures attention intermittently, if at all. At the center, the implementation program may be viewed as a linear or bi-lateral process; but at the local level, the implementation process is experienced daily as a multi-lateral process" (Farrar et al, pp. 12-13)

It may be pointed out that the bi-lateral model is simply a combination of features from both these two more basic models – the center-periphery one and the multilateral models. The existence of various models of the implementation process cannot be taken as conclusive evidence that the concept of implementation is obscure; it merely indicates that there is a multiplicity of implementation phenomena which await more elaborate attempts to construct a typology.

Yet, it should be strongly emphasized that the relation between policy formator and policy implementor may at least theoretically be modeled without authority as the distinctive characteristic in the relationship. R. E. Elmore distinguishes between four models of implementation – the systems management model, the bureaucratic process model, the organizational development model and the conflict and bargaining model (Elmore 1978). In the two last mentioned models bargaining, reciprocal interaction and exchange are recognized as possible mechanisms for the accomplishment of objectives. A national government may approach a local government implementing a national policy *not only* on the basis of whatever authority it may command; clearly, other mechanisms for the securing of agreement and support on the part of the local government are both relevant and frequent. Exchange seems to be particularly relevant for the implementation of interregional and interlocal policies arrived at by means of voluntary coordination.

The implementation process involves a number of participants; are some more important than others? R. F. Elmore argues convincingly that much of implementation analysis has focussed upon those placed high up in the public authority structure, whereas implementation analysis actually demands that attention be focussed upon tho-

se responsible for the production of outcomes on a day-to-day basis. The crucial nexus in the implementation process is the behavior of those who are placed most closely to the production of outputs, i.e. those placed far down in the hierarchy. Elmore argues:

"Recall the logic of backward mapping outlined earlier: Begin with a concrete statement of the behavior that creates the occasion for a policy intervention, describe a set of organizational operations that can be expected to affect that behavior, describe the expected effect of those operations, and then describe for each level of the implementation process what effect one would expect that level to have on the target behavior and what resources are required for that effect to occur. The advantage of beginning with a concrete behavior and focussing on the delivery – level mechanism for affecting that behavior is that it focusses attention on reciprocity and discretion." (Elmore 1982:28)

Even if a great deal of implementation analysis has focussed singlemindedly on the formator of policy and even if a naive assumption about the possibility of hierarchical control has plagued much of public administration – as Elmore states – it is hardly fruitful to reverse these exaggerations in the opposite direction making the implementor the sole crucial party to the implementation game. It is not clear what is meant by a "behavior that creates the occasion for a policy intervention"; there is practically no limit to the number of instances of such behavior that the scholar may find, but how are they to be selected if one cannot study them all. A necessary component of an implementation perspective is the enactment of a set of goals by an enactor or, as mentioned in the introduction, a formator. The goals of the formator may not be precise or clear, and they may change over time or be in conflict with the goals of the implementor. Yet, without inclusion of the formator and the goals enacted the implementation has no determinate focus. If there are no goals enacted, how could there be anything to be implemented?

#### *The initiator and the alternatives*

Two intrinsic aspects of the concept of implementation have remained implicit in the analysis so far. Policy formulation may not be policy initiation. It is not enough to point out the formator and enactor of a policy; a complete implementation proposition has to give the actor who initiated the

policy – its ends or means or both: the *initiator*. While a sharp separation between the set of actors that constitutes the formator of policy and the set of actors that comprises the implementor of policy appears to be a conceptual necessity, this distinction does not apply to the set of initiating actors. The initiator may be the formulator, the enactor or the implementor, though it must not be the case that the initiator is the formator who is the implementor. Basic to the idea of an implementation process is the interaction phenomena between two distinct sets of actors, the one set communicating directives as to what is to be done and how is to be done to the other set. In implementation processes where authority structures are involved it may frequently be the case that the lower level implementor is also the initiator, the final policy being decided upon by the formator or enactor placed at a higher level. Actually, interesting implementation phenomena often take place when the initiator and the implementor coincide, because at least one condition for successful implementation is fulfilled, viz. motivation on the part of the implementors. However, the fact that the implementor has had an opportunity to influence the design of policy does not imply that the policy enacted will be the one initiated. The distinction between policies that initiated from the implementor and policies that have simply been communicated without participation for execution is a valid one as it discriminates between policies.

The concept of *alternative* is as basic to policy as is the concept of an objective. Whatever definition of “public policy” is employed the theoretical assumption is that policy-makers face *choices* as to both ends and means. If a policy comprises more than one end there must be a selection between a number of alternatives. The process of determining ends and means is often a struggle over a variety of alternatives, states or behaviors that cannot exist at the same time. The rationality of the process of arriving at the policy to be implemented is a function of how the intentional side of the policy is defined; if the means and ends of the policy are chosen under the restriction:

- (i)  $P(\text{ends}_i = \text{ends}_a) = .9$
- (ii)  $P(\text{means}_i = \text{means}_a) = .9$
- (iii)  $P(\text{means-end relation}_i = \text{means-end relation}_a) = .9$

then the policy has a substantial chance (.73) of success. If, on the contrary, goals are chosen that

are not feasible or at least not feasible under the selection of a certain set of means, or if means are selected that bear little resemblance of the actual outputs employed, then there is little probability that the policy will meet with successful implementation. Policies may be compared using the simple schema introduced above; a policy  $P_1$  may be declared as more rational than a policy  $P_2$  if both policies have the same goal function – (i) – but policy  $P_1$  displays a higher probability value on the means function – (ii) – or the means-end function – (iii) – and so on.

The autonomy of implementation processes taking place in authority structures is a function of how narrowly defined the policy to be implemented is. Policies are sets of directives as to ends and means of action to be carried out; the formator may state the ends that are to be achieved unambiguously but leave the implementor some *degree of freedom* as to the choice between the means to be employed, or the formator may only lay down some general directives as to what is to be accomplished leaving the choice of means to the implementor entirely. The more alternatives that are not ruled out by the formator the greater the autonomy of the implementor. In implementation processes that result from exchange or bargaining the implementor and the formator arrive at an understanding of what ends are to be pursued and what means are considered suitable constraining the further process of implementation. Often the implementor has no freedom of action with regard to the ends of the policy, but the implementor may command some autonomy concerning the selection of means, i.e., the implementor makes choices with regard to alternatives for the accomplishment of policy objectives. The implementor may face heteronomy in relation to policy objectives but autonomy with regard to means. If the implementor were to have autonomy as regards both ends and means the formator would become superfluous.

Successful implementation refers not only to a situation where the alternatives initially defined – the  $\text{ends}_i$  and the  $\text{means}_i$  – correspond to actual outputs and outcomes – the  $\text{ends}_a$  and the  $\text{means}_a$ . It is not enough that the accomplishment function is satisfied; successful implementation also necessarily implies that the means employed bring about the ends desired, i.e., the causal function is the second important restriction that has to be met. Let us consider what this requirement implies and the difficulties that are involved.

*The Concept of an Outcome*

The concept of outcome has been much debated in the policy literature, the problem being the definition of the distinction between outputs and outcomes (Dye 1966, Dye 1976). Let us look at a solution to this problem suggested by F. Levy, A. Meltsner and A. Wildavsky in their *Urban Outcomes* (1974) in order to get some perspective on the difficulties involved; these conceptual problems are, of course, extremely relevant to the concept of implementation as it has "outcome" as one of its key words. Levy, Meltsner and Wildavsky identify two basic properties of an outcome:

- (a) consequence of an output
- (b) valuation (pp. 1–23)

The first property seems well entrenched in policy analysis, as there is agreement among scholars that outcomes should not be mixed up with governmental outputs. There remains the difficult problem of finding positive criteria for the identification of the *consequences* of outputs. What is a consequence of an output? The authors of *Urban Outcomes* hasten to qualify their definition of "outcome" as the consequence of output by removing ultimate consequences:

"Just as outcomes are seen as the near consequences of outputs, so also do we want to explain outcomes by their most immediate causes. We cling to *close causation* partly because more distant causes are difficult to disentangle." (p. 4)

A fair interpretation of this passage may look something like:

DEF. "Y is an outcome of X"  
= <sub>def.</sub> "Y is caused by output X, which precedes Y within time span T"

There are two methodological problems involved in the proposed definition that the authors do not solve. Firstly, there is the vague expressions "near consequence" and "close causation", which could be specified in any number of ways; i.e., the values of the variable T are not specified in the definition. Secondly, two valid questions concerning an output may be distinguished:

- (i) What were the outcomes (effects) of an output? (The causation problem)
- (ii) What outcomes are relevant to the evaluation of a policy? (The relevance problem).

The causation focus is certainly not identical with the relevance perspective. A policy  $P_1$  may through its outputs, result in outcomes  $O_1$  in the sense that  $P_1$  is somehow causally related to  $O_1$ ; this is not the place to open up a discussion about the various meanings of "causation"; suffice it to here note that any strict conception of causation would admit the possibility that  $P_1$  is attended by outcomes –  $O_2$  – that are not to be attributed to  $P_1$ .  $P_1$  may fail to cause any outcomes or  $P_1$  may fail to achieve its objectives because other operating forces cause outcomes that are counterproductive to  $P_1$ . In any case we may recognize two sets of outcomes:

- (i) States of affairs that were caused by  $P_1 = O_1$
- (ii) States of affairs that were not caused by  $P_1$  but follow  $P_1$  in time and are relevant to  $P_1 = O_2$ .

Clearly, implementation analysis covers both types of outcomes,  $O_1$  and  $O_2$ . Thus the outcomes include not only the effects of outputs.

With regard to the causal interpretation of outcomes there remains a formidable problem as the implementation analyst using the causal definition has to come up with operational criteria of causal effectiveness of outputs. It is vital to separate the question of policy accomplishment from the question of causal effectiveness, as the achievement of a policy objective may depend upon other factors than simply the outputs produced in the policy. A policy  $P_1$  may be attended by a number of outcomes relevant for the accomplishment of its objectives, though the connection between  $P_1$  and these outcomes  $O_2$  may be a spurious one. The relation between *policy effectiveness* and *policy accomplishment* is visualized in Diagram 3.

Let me begin with type I, the occurrence of policy effectiveness and policy failure, which on the surface appears as contradictory. A policy  $P_1$  may be followed by outcomes of type  $O_1$ , i.e., the policy may display effectiveness, yet this may not be enough. The policy  $P_1$  may require for the accomplishment of its objectives outcomes that are different from  $O_1$ . This is exactly what happens when a policy has consequences other than those intended. Non-intended or unintended outcomes are as relevant to implementation analysts as are intended outcomes. A policy may be effective and achieve certain outcomes, but these may be the wrong ones. From the fact that a policy  $P_1$  has



Diagram 3. *The Causal and Accomplishment Functions*

	Accomplishment	
Causality		
	Policy Failure	Policy Success
Policy Effectiveness	I	II
Policy Ineffectiveness	III	IV

outcomes of type  $O_1$  even if these were unintended it does not follow logically that  $P_1$  is a failure. This could very well be true, but it does not have to be: a policy may be detrimental to its own purposes by bringing about consequences that are contradictory to the outcomes that would accomplish the objectives of the policy. Such self-defeating policies are by no means interesting only from a theoretical point of view. However, in addition to  $O_1$  outcomes a policy  $P_1$  may have outcomes of type  $O_2$  which satisfy the objectives of  $P_1$ . The lesson is, of course, that unintended outcomes are not always dysfunctional.

When a policy is effective and its objectives are accomplished we have type II; again, it should be pointed out that the accomplishment may be due to the occurrence of type  $O_2$  outcomes at the same time as type  $O_1$  outcomes occur because these two types of outcomes may not be contradictory or opposed to each other. They may even be complementary or substitutable not to mention neutral vis a vis each other. Thus, it is apparent that the case in which a policy is effective and *by means of* its effectiveness brings about the accomplishment of its objectives is only one among several possible types of combination of the causal and the relevant interpretations of the concept of outcomes.

Types III and IV deserve a brief comment: that policies which are ineffective also happen to spell failure comes as no surprise to the policy analyst (type III), but the occurrence of both ineffectiveness and policy success (type IV) may require an explanation. A policy  $P_1$ , lacking outcomes of type  $O_1$  may, in spite of this, have outcomes of type  $O_2$ , which accomplish the objectives of  $P_1$ . Policies may be introduced at the right time in the right setting; they may contribute little themselves to their success, yet they find their objectives realized (type IV). To put it the other way around: it does not follow from the fact that the analyst may establish that a policy is successful,

that the analyst may attribute the success of the operation to the policy! The implementation analyst must be aware of both sets of outcomes –  $O_1$  &  $O_2$  – in order to carry out two essential tasks of implementation analysis:

- (a) to evaluate the extent of goal achievement
- (b) to unravel patterns of causal effectiveness

The idea that valuation is an intrinsic part of an outcome is very much emphasized by Levy, Meltner and Wildavsky:

“Our concept of outcomes includes a subjective element of evaluation because it involves human preferences – likes, dislikes, pain and pleasure. In this book we are the evaluators, and we study the distribution of outputs precisely in order to make normative judgements.” (pp. 2–3)

This emphasis on “normative judgements” may be questioned. The fact that outcomes include subjective phenomena like peoples’ emotional states does not imply that the concept of an outcome is a normative concept. Actually, implementation would become a subspecies of ethics (or esthetics) if outcome were not to be a descriptive concept. At least in theory, it seems as if the outcomes of a policy can be described and analyzed in a value-neutral fashion.

#### *Time*

By developing the original implementation formula:

Implementation = F (Intention, Output, Outcome)

we are now at a stage where a more powerful and complex concept of implementation may be introduced:

DEF. Imp = F (Policy, Outcome, Formator, Implementor, Initiator, Time)

The requirement of a time variable in a complete implementation proposition is based on the following argument: suppose one asks about a policy  $P_1$  whether it has been implemented; then one needs information about the extent of congruence between policy objectives and outcomes, but that is not enough. In addition, there has to be a decision concerning the time span that may pass before an *implementation judgement* can be said to be neither premature nor belated: when is it appropriate to ask about a program whether its objectives have been realized?

Obviously, different kinds of programs require different time spans for their objectives to be accomplished, but the problem is to specify the criteria by which to make the decision concerning the appropriate time span. Often policies have time lags attached to them stating officially a prediction of when the implementation of the policy can be judged completed. Of course, the implementation analyst may start from such time decisions, but the analyst need not do so and may find it appropriate to inquire into the extent of goal achievement before or after such officially stipulated time intervals. What must be emphasized is that it may make a difference when an implementation judgement is stated; time may be conducive to the accomplishment of objectives meaning that an implementation analysis today may differ from one conducted tomorrow; or a policy that used to be successful may be less well implemented later on. Any judgement about the extent of successful implementation must specify in addition to the policy, the actors and the outcomes involved, the time span that has passed since the policy was enacted, as well as the implications of various time intervals for the potential *implementability* of the policy.

This is the *statics* of the concept of implementation. When we move to the *dynamics* of implementation the methodological problems seem to crop up everywhere. It appears that it is easier to introduce a formal concept of implementation than to lay down criteria for what policy implementation means in actual practice or how the evolving implementation process is to be modeled. I will first point out a few major methodological difficulties inherent in the application of the concept of implementation.

### The dynamic aspect of implementation

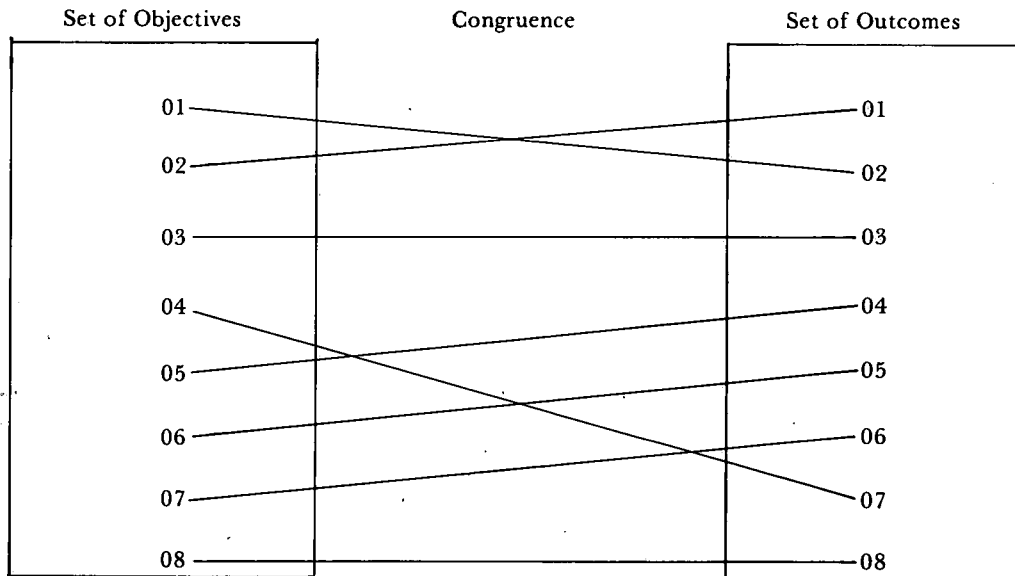
It does not follow that implementation exists just because it is possible to state what implementation would amount to if it came about. We could possess a clear and articulate concept of implementation but we may fail to identify cases of implementation. Actually, there are different arguments in the literature to the effect that implementation or successful implementation at least does not exist, because each and every process of implementation fails in its purpose. If implementation is impossible or difficult, it is not because we lack an adequate concept of implementation but because the relationship between policy and action is such that processes of implementation have a number of properties that are not conducive to the occurrence of successful implementation. Let us focus upon the implications of implementation as a process for the concept.

Obviously, an implementor gives practical effect to a policy by taking action in relation to the objectives of the policy. Hopefully, the implementor is sooner or later confronted with a set of outcomes that are positively relevant to the realization of the objectives. If these outcomes are congruent with the objectives then there will be successful implementation. However, in a dynamic perspective the concept of policy accomplishment is troublesome. The logic of policy accomplishment may be visualized in the following manner in Diagram 4.

If the set of outcomes is related to the set of objectives in such a way that to each objective there is a congruent outcome and vice versa – what the logicians call a one-to-one relationship – then we have policy accomplishment *par preference*. But this is only theory. In actual practice objectives do not find their outcomes and there are outcomes that lack objectives. Outcomes have to be interpreted in terms of the objectives and one objective may be partly satisfied by several different outcomes, or it may be satisfied by one outcome but be in opposition to another. A policy contains a number of goals – ends and means concerning various policy aspects – and some of these goals may find their outcomes whereas others may confront outcomes that are contrary to these objectives. No objective procedure for summing up the partial accomplishments of objectives or adding and subtracting pros and cons is known.

It may even be argued that a judgement about implementation depends on how one views the environment in which implementation takes place.

Diagram 4. Policy Accomplishment



ces; if a policy is only partly implementable from the very beginning then maybe this has to be added to the equation. It may very well be argued that implementation analysis requires evaluation criteria that are not strictly intersubjective. Whether a goal has been achieved or not depends on how the goal and the outcomes are perceived by the actors involved in the implementation process. Moreover, if it could be argued that whether there is policy success or policy failure depends on how the actors perceive the environment and judge the implementability of the policy or on the means to be employed, then certainly judgements about policy eu- or dysfunctioning will vary; what is successful implementation to one group is failure to another group because these groups perceive the ends, the means and the outcomes differently. There is no simple solution to these problems. The implementation analyst has, however, to recognize them and state clearly what criteria *he himself* employs for the selection of objectives and outcomes as well as make clear how the relationship between objectives and outcomes is interpreted and summarized in a statement about the extent to which the implementation was successful. In some instances such criteria of selection and interpretation are not problematical, but in other instances the analyst may have to accept working with alternative sets of criteria.

#### *The Paradox of Implementation*

Recent implementation literature has cast doubt on the applicability of the concept of implementation: decide on the goals, find the means and bring about the outcomes; it is argued that the following dynamic properties of implementation processes negate such a decision analysis:

- (a) interaction between objectives and outcomes
- (b) redefinition or reinvention of objectives
- (c) reinterpretation of outcomes when convenient

It used to be argued that implementation was different from the simple execution of policies (Wildavsky 1973); implementation analysis combined as a matter of fact the traditional public administration focus upon execution with the emerging interest in evaluation methodology. If implementation is more than execution then policy objectives must be determined in order to make evaluation possible — it was argued. Thus, the concept of implementation implies that objectives be differentiated from outcomes and objectives and outcomes held constant. If the concept of a process of implementation implies the opposite then we end up in a paradox: the concept of implementation has the opposite properties to those of

the concept of a process of implementation. Wildavsky has introduced this new idea about a process of implementation as resulting not in implementation but in evolution; he states:

“Implementation is evolution. Since it takes place in a world we never made, we are usually right in the middle of the process, with events having occurred before and (we hope) continuing afterward. At each point we must cope with new circumstances that allow us to actualize different potentials in whatever policy ideas we are implementing.” (Wildavsky 1978, p. 114)

If implementation is the redefinition of objectives and the reinterpretation of outcomes — if implementation is continuous — how can there be implementation? The evolutionary conception of implementation implies that implementation processes may not be neatly separated from stages of policy formulation mingling objectives and outcomes. It also implies — and this is the paradox — that implementation is endless: “Implementation will always be evolutionary; it will inevitably reformulate as well as carry out policy” (Wildavsky 1977, p. 116). The counter-argument is a simple one: all empirical phenomena are in a sense a seamless web which defies any set of concepts; this is true of the concept of implementation as it is true of any social science concept. The applicability of a concept, like the concept of implementation, depends upon the choice of the case to be analyzed; in some general sense all concepts are inadequate because of *Panta Rei*.

The fact that empirical phenomena vary in their susceptibility to analysis implies that it devolves upon the implementation analyst to differentiate between policies; some policies may be more susceptible to implementation analysis than others. A promising line to follow in implementation analysis may lie in attempting to identify such criteria; obviously, policies that do not have articulate objectives attached to them or whose objectives change rapidly would not be very interesting for the implementation analyst. However, it should be pointed out that on the other hand the occurrence of changes in the goal function of a policy is not a major problem in implementation analysis; on the contrary, its focus is highly suitable for the identification of policy redefinitions and outcome reinterpretation. The analyst of implementation processes may face a type of implementation phenomenon characterized by a step-wise implementation, i.e., subgoals entering into a larger

goal function are being implemented at discrete points of time over a longer time interval. It may be the case that the implementation of one set of subgoals is followed by a process of redefining the next set of subgoals to be implemented. It has been argued that there has to be a process of redefinition as policy failure is inevitable:

“Unless a policy matter is narrow and uninteresting (i.e. preprogrammed) the policy will never be able to contain its own consequences”. (Wildavsky 1978:116)

This is an *empirical* argument that is open to refutation pending a major survey of program accomplishments, if it is possible to arrive at a consensus as to what is an interesting program and whether a particular program really has attained its policy objectives. Is for example the Wildavsky generalization true of the implementation of a system of higher education in the north of Sweden after World War Two (Lane 1983)?

#### *Impossibility of Implementation*

Another theoretical argument about implementation failure asserts not that processes of implementation of necessity transform the elements of implementation but that the idea of an implementation process contains special assumptions about conditions that an implementation process must satisfy in order to be successful.

In his *The Limits of Administration* (1976) C. C. Hood ventures to suggest some hypotheses about what type of implementation process would “produce perfect policy implementation” (Hood 1976:6). Such a process would satisfy the conditions of “perfect administration”, listed as

- a unitary administrative system with a single line of authority
- enforcement of uniform rules or objectives
- a set of clear and authoritative objectives implementable on the basis of perfect obedience or perfect administrative control
- perfect coordination and perfect information within and between administrative units
- absence of time pressure
- unlimited material resources for tackling the problem
- unambiguous overall objectives and perfect political acceptability of the policies pursued. (Hood 1976:6–8).

The model of perfect administration suggested by Hood is intended as an ideal-type construct to be instrumental in finding systematic limits in actually occurring processes of implementation failure (Hood 1976:190–207). It is thus pointless to criticize Hood for stating unrealistic assumptions; the weakness of the Hood argument lies elsewhere. What is questionable is not the extent to which a concrete implementation process adheres to the ideal-type properties true of “perfect administration” and “perfect policy implementation”; but the abstract hypotheses about the conditions conducive to successful implementation processes are problematic in themselves.

First a minor objection: these assumptions approach implementation from the narrow focus of the concept of authority, just as the characteristics of authority relations – hierarchy, obedience, control and perfect coordination – are viewed as the mechanism for the accomplishment of successful implementation in such processes. It is true that it has been argued that a basic explanation for failures in national government policy is to be found in the fact that the national government may have too little authority. In an oft-quoted statement Martha Derthick asserted:

“Due to the division of authority among governments in the federal system, the federal government cannot order these governments to do anything. It gets them to carry out its purposes by offering incentives in the form of aid, which they may accept or not, and by attaching conditions to the aid”. (Derthick 1972, p. 84).

And J. T. Murphy arrives at a similar conclusion about the vital importance of authority to implementation successes in his analysis of federal education reform efforts in the US:

“The primary cause, however, is political. The federal system – with its dispersion of power and control – not only permits but encourages the evasion and dilution of federal reform, making it nearly impossible for the federal administrator to impose program priorities; those not diluted by Congressional intervention can be ignored during state and local implementation”. (Murphy 1971, p. 60).

However, other empirical work on how implementation comes about has resulted in a different finding, viz. that mechanisms more symmetrical in nature such as exchange, bargaining and negotiation are more germane to the implementation pro-

cess than authority and its characteristics (Barrett & Fudge (1981) *Policy and Action: Essays on the implementation of public policy*). Empirically, these mechanisms for the implementation of policy appear to be as important as structures of authority if the work of E. Bardach is consulted, *Implementation Game* (1977). And when authority fails exchange at least may do no worse, since both types of mechanisms for deciding on collective action are vulnerable to both the complexity of joint action and the typical expression of resistance to change, viz. delays (Wildavsky 1973:87–124).

A more fundamental objection is that it is questionable, to say the least, whether conditions listed really are conducive to perfect implementation. If no actual implementation processes satisfy the model, then maybe it is the model which is imperfect rather than the processes of implementation that are failures. Are perfect information, complete control and unlimited resources necessary to successful implementation? Such a hypothesis does not follow from the interpretation of the concept of implementation suggested above. Are perfect coordination, unitary administrative structure and perfect political acceptability sufficient to ensure successful implementation? These theoretical assumptions are connected more with an interpretation of the concept of implementation than with the evaluation of empirical evidence concerning processes of implementation. C. Fudge and S. Barrett state:

“Part of the literature we reviewed suggests that control over policy execution or the ability to ensure compliance with policy objectives is a key factor determining the success or failure of the policy . . . However, if implementation is seen as ‘getting something done’, then performance rather than conformance is the main objective and compromise a means of achieving it”. (Barrett & Fudge 1981:258.)

Actually, both Hood and Fudge & Barrett assume that the interpretation of the concept of an implementation process follows from the particular concept of implementation. If implementation is not “putting policy into effect”, Fudge & Barrett state, then:

“The emphasis . . . shifts away from a master/subordinate relationship to one where policy-makers and implementers are more equal and the *interaction* between them becomes the focus for study”. (Barrett & Fudge 1981:258.)

I would argue that the concept of implementation and the concept of an implementation process should be kept separate analytically corresponding to the distinction between the static and the dynamic implementation perspectives. Stating a definition of "implementation" should be a neutral task in relation to the problem of finding what factors are conducive to successful implementation. It is one problem to analyse what must obtain in order to apply the concept of implementation, and another problem is to state hypotheses as to how implementation – in particular successful implementation – comes about.

There is hardly much to be gained from prejudging the solution to the second problem by making some special decision mechanism or decision situation a necessary element of the concept of implementation. Why could not organizational complexity or autonomy, just like exchange and negotiation, be conducive to or compatible with implementation as "putting a policy into effect", just as it could be the case that the authority mechanism may only achieve a state describable as "getting something done". An abstract model of the process of implementation must consider the possibility that the concept of implementation is by no means restricted to some ideal-typical construct of a bureaucracy. It seems vital, as has been suggested, to introduce the new concept of an implementation structure in order to move theory formation out of the Hood straightjacket of a single hierarchical administrative machine perfectly implementing exactly specified objectives.

#### *Implementation processes as implementation structures*

In the dynamic interpretation of the concept of implementation the events constituting a process of implementation are approached as pieces forming a whole. What is the nature of such wholes? There are two sides to this problem, on the one hand a demarcation problem – how to separate what is part of an implementation process and what is not – and on the other an identification problem – what are the basic pieces of a process of implementation. This distinction is, of course, analytical as we need an answer to the identification problem to solve the demarcation problem. In their innovative paper "Implementation Structures: A New Unit of Administrative Analysis" B. Hjern and D. O. Porter suggest solutions to these two problems. Concerning the demarcation problem they state that:

"An implementation structure is comprised of *subsets* of members within organizations which view a programme as their primary (or an instrumentally important) interest." (Hjern & Porter 1981:216).

This definition or description of an implementation structure has, as the authors explicitly recognize, a fundamentally phenomenological tone; what *ties* a set of actors together in an implementation structure is their attitude towards a programme.

This first characterization of an implementation structure raises more questions than it offers solutions to the demarcation or identification problems. Obviously, an implementation structure in some sense consists of sets of actors, but which sets of actors constitute one and only one implementation structure? Is it enough that these actors are members of organizations and all have a "primary interest" (whatever that is) in a program? Is it not necessary for people who have a "primary" interest in a policy also to wish or attempt to put it into effect? Could one not conceive of an implementation structure that includes actors with varying interests – even opposing ones – in relation to a program, which they interpret differently? The phenomenological criterion suggested for the identification of implementation structures follows from the emphasis placed by the authors on properties of processes of implementation other than those of the Hood model: organizational complexity, self-selection of participants, multiplicity of goals and motives, local discretion. Yet, if a process of implementation covers a longer time span, then it may be necessary to lay down objective criteria for demarcating who is and who is not part of an implementation structure. Hjern and Porter also discuss the identification problem:

"Implementation structures are not organizations. They are comprised of parts of many organizations; organizations are comprised of parts of many programmes. As analytic constructs, implementation structures are conceptualized to identify the units of purposive action which implement programmes. They are 'phenomenological administrative units', partly defined by their participating members." (Hjern & Porter 1981:222.)

The description of implementation structures as comprising units that implement programs is, of course, of little help as it is circular; the distinction between concrete and abstract units is more promising as it breaks with the traditional idea of a

single bureaucracy implementing by itself a policy – which A. Dunsire has modeled in his *Implementation in a Bureaucracy* (1976) as “perfect administration”.

“In the treatment of the implementation process in this volume we have worked on the assumption that when a decision has been taken at its appropriate level, operationalised into instructions at succeeding levels until operating level is reached, and so has become an output to the environment, whatever it was appropriate should happen at any point in the process *has* happened. We have assumed ‘perfect implementation’.” (Dunsire 1976:230).

If the elements of an implementation structure are identified as parts of organizations that are not themselves an organization, then it sounds strange to read about failures “to identify implementation structures as administrative entities distinct from organizations” (Hjern & Porter 1981:216).

Either an implementation structure is a construct, simply a “unit for administrative analysis”, or “implementation structures are administrative entities” (Hjern & Porter 1981:219), but not both. I would argue that the concept of an implementation structure is relevant for the analysis of implementation processes, and that in the dynamic perspective of an implementation one always has to be aware of the fallacy of reification or misplaced concreteness. An implementation structure comprises those actors in one or various organizations that are responsible for the formation and execution of programs that belong to a policy. Though it is not necessary to define “implementation structure” phenomenologically, the set of initiators, formators and implementors is best seen as a unit for administrative *analysis*, not as an administrative entity.

#### *Implementation as Political Symbolism*

There is yet another argument against the possibility of an implementation process. It is not a very precise one, but its import is to highlight the use of an implementation process itself as a strategic target for political action. Fudge and Barrett state:

“In this sense policy may become a substitute for action, to demonstrate that something is being done without actually tackling the real problem . . . governments or policy-makers wish to be seen to be responsive without necessarily really wanting to take responsibility for intervention. Equally, policy-makers wish to be seen as po-

werful. Symbolic policy also serves to avoid tackling the real issue of attempting to change the ‘negotiated order’ or upsetting powerful groups which might show up only too clearly the limits of the policy-makers’ power.” (Barrett & Fudge 1981:276)

It is an insight gained from studies of implementation processes not only that the implementors may resist change or approach both objectives and programs in terms of their own interpretation, but also that the formator may find it necessary or advantageous to neglect policy execution. However important such findings may be, they hardly disprove the possibility of successful implementation. The symbolic argument is often backed by statements to the effect that the policy process – the initiation, enactment and implementation of policies – is typically characterized by uncertainty, vagueness, complexity, conflict and pseudo actions.

Two reminders are not out of place here: (a) the fact that a process of implementation has these properties does not preclude the applicability of the formal concept of implementation; goals may be accomplished because they were intertwined with other goals, combined with pseudo political behavior as well as executed on the basis of extensive uncertainty among the participants. From what it means for a policy to be implemented – the static perspective – it does not follow how it is to be implemented – the dynamic perspective; (b) the extent to which each and every implementation process has more or fewer symbolic elements, and what the consequences are for the possibility of goal accomplishment is, of course, an entirely empirical question. If all goals and all programmes are more the result of pseudo politics, then implementation is indeed impossible, but this is not a defect of the conceptual framework. The observation of symbolism and pseudo action in implementation processes calls for an attempt to distinguish between different types of implementation processes.

#### *Varieties of implementation processes*

The logic of the dynamics of implementation forces the implementation analyst to be aware of the different possible properties of implementation processes:

- (a) continuous versus step-wise implementation
- (b) repeated versus unique implementation

- (c) innovation implementation versus maintenance implementation
- (d) short span versus long term implementation.

The formal concept of implementation introduced above does not lose its applicability because processes of implementation do not happen to fit a simple notion of the implementation process such as: the unique continuous implementation of a social innovation in a short-span. The distinction between continuous and step-wise implementation processes alerts the implementation analyst to the possibility of sub-optimization: a policy may comprise a number of subgoals which may only be implemented in a discrete fashion due to the interdependencies among the goals; once one subgoal has been implemented another subgoal may be implemented and so on. The time distinction draws the attention to the fact that some programs are commitments for long periods of time; the fact that such programs require a substantial evolution over time does not necessarily imply that their objectives must change; it simply means that premature assessments about policy accomplishment are likely if the time dimension is neglected. Programs to be implemented are not of one kind; and programs may be approached differently depending on whether they are about to be initiated or in the process of consolidation and maintenance; consider the differences between doing an implementation analysis of a standard program for the surveillance of traffic rules and the unique program to start a new university. The goals with regard to the former may be so apparent that they are trivial, while in the latter case they may be so complex that they contain goal conflicts and unrealistic goals; in the former case we have standard operating procedures which are oriented towards the maintenance of certain states whereas in the latter the program offers innovation and social experiment. It may be the case that a program that calls for repeated maintenance implementation has to be evaluated differently from a program that calls for major innovation, where the goals may be changed and the outputs revised; also, it is pertinent to look into the point of time at which an innovative program is redefined into a consolidating program that actually has a goal function tied to it that calls for an implementation analysis of the extent to which the accomplishments already in existence are being maintained.

The distinction between the statics and the dynamics of implementation remains relevant once

one is aware of the variety of implementation phenomena; the formal concept of implementation requires for its applicability only that its concepts may be applied to the various *stages* of an implementation process, not to the whole process as it were. The formal concept may be very suitable for the detection of goals changes, program redefinition, discrepancies between innovation objectives and consolidation goals, short term goals and long term objectives – all phenomena that the simple equation of implementation as evolution fails to do justice to.

#### Evaluation and the implementation perspective

Is implementation analysis the same as evaluation analysis? The concept of implementation as evolution could amount to a denial of any identity between the two, because if objectives and outcomes continuously interact how could the outcomes be evaluated in terms of a fixed set of objectives? Actually, arguing in favor of the paradox of implementation may be interpreted as an attempt to make a sharp distinction between implementation analysis and evaluation research; each would have its distinct purposes and there would be little use for evaluation techniques in implementation analysis because only "uninteresting programs" have a fixed set of objectives tied to them, whose achievement may be evaluated. Recognizing the paradox of implementation and the hypothesis that implementation is simply evolution let us try to pin down where implementation analysis and evaluation methodology meet and where they diverge (Browne & Wildavsky 1983).

For some time there is a growing literature on evaluation and its methodology (see Scriven 1976, Freeman 1977, Williams 1971, Rossi and Williams 1972, Struening & Guttentag 1975, Ruthman 1977); its relevance to implementation analysis cannot be denied as long as the formal concept of implementation is upheld. Implementation analysis may actually be regarded as a development of the traditional concern of public administration to expedite the execution of policies by the addition of some doses of evaluation research; it is not enough in implementation analysis to look at what happens after political reforms have been enacted as there is a component in implementation analysis that goes beyond the focus on program execution in public administration as it was traditionally conceived. The concept of implementation implies that assessment takes place; it is made by the actors involved in the implementation process and



one basic task of the implementation analyst is to evaluate the implementation; given the policy – its ends and means – the implementation analyst cannot confine himself to a simple statement of what happens afterwards; the analyst has to use all the tools of evaluation research and associated fields like TA (technology assessment) and SIA (social impact analysis) (see e.g. Meidinger & Schnaiberg 1980) in order to arrive at an implementation judgement of the extent of successful implementation, the *first* major focus in implementation analysis.

Success of failure are not the only properties of the implementation of public policies that the implementation analyst is interested in; his focus is broader than that of ER, TA or SIA. The process of enforcing a policy has its own logic, which is the *second* major focus of the implementation analyst. There are a number of aspects of the implementation process other than the accomplishment of the policy objectives that the analyst is interested in:

- (a) the strategies and tactics employed by various parties to the implementation game (see Bardach)
- (b) the mechanism of delay as a decision parameter (see Wildavsky 1973)
- (c) the variety of motives among the participating actors (see Derthrick)
- (d) the need for coalition building and fixing the game (see Barret & Fudge)

Adding evaluation means that time becomes a crucial variable in the implementation equation. After a certain interval of time it is appropriate in an evaluation approach to check the program to see whether its objectives have been accomplished, as the program is in a sense finished. In an implementation analysis time loses some of its importance since to the implementation analyst the question may always be reopened: what are the outcomes of a policy now? If the policy failed to achieve its objectives, a longer time span may be more interesting: what happens and how it happens after the policy has been enacted are relevant questions at different points of time. In the dynamic analysis of implementation the evaluation focus may have to be played down depending on the policy studied and the time span chosen. An assessment approach may be less relevant in relation to policies with goal functions that contain conflicts with regard to the ends or the means

or both as well as in relation to a policy that has too simplistic a goal function – the definitive nature of the goals almost certainly ensuring program failure. In such cases it may be interesting, from a theoretical point of view only, to formulate what successful implementation is all about; in practice, however, the implementation analyst may do better to concentrate on how implementation comes about even though the objectives of the policy were ambiguous, its technology unsound and the actors involved in conflict about how outcomes are to be assessed.

#### *The two contexts of implementation*

In his *The Implementation Perspective* W. Williams argues strongly in favor of taking such a perspective. What does it amount to? Williams states:

“The basic need is for a decision making rationale and framework to shape choices that will orient social program organizations toward better field performance. The recommended decision framework for guiding action in social service delivery programs, I label the implementation perspective.” (Williams 1980:4–5)

Is the implementation perspective some kind of practical science of administration, a body of knowledge that policy makers and implementors could draw upon as they approach the implementation of policies? Maybe the implementation perspective is just another label for implementation analysis, the evaluative study of policy execution in the public sector? This is hardly what Williams has in mind; for Williams the implementation perspective is the perspective of the implementation practitioners, not that of the implementation theoretician:

“The implementation perspective will force a particular agency to ask hard questions about its *own* underlying commitment and capacity. At basic issue is whether the agency can alter its orientation and style of decision making to develop the resources and the organizational structure needed for *implementing* the implementation perspective.” (Williams 1980:101)

Williams’ basic idea concerns the implementing of an implementation perspective; and he argues that it is difficult for an organization to carry out (implement) an ambition to implement an implementation perspective (introducing an implementation perspective seems to result in an em-

barking on an infinity of implementing implementations). Williams, of course, regards implementation from the point of view of the actor(s) involved in the processes of implementation.

However, from the fact that actors are participating in something they label an "implementation process" does not follow that there implementation is really going on. As several implementation studies have testified to actors may execute policies believing that their actions will eventually bring about implementation, but naturally they may be wrong. In order to state the extent to which an implementation perspective meets with successful implementation there must be a different implementation perspective, that of the theoretician(s). Just as implementation is the putting into effect of a policy bringing about outcomes that are congruent with the objectives, implementation itself – i.e. successful implementation – may be regarded by policy makers as an objective to be implemented. This is the implementation perspective of Williams: knowledge about the feasibility of introducing new program activities – "implementation analysis" – and knowledge about how well various implementations are developing – "implementation assessment" (Williams 176:280–82). And what is referred to here as "analysis" and "assessment" respectively is the knowledge of the participants, it is not, of course, infallible. Thus, the fact that an organization implementing programs have an implementation perspective does not dispense with an examination of the extent to which the implementation perspective results in actual implementation or the extent to which the assessment made in an implementation perspective is correct. Thus, we have to make a distinction between presence or absence of an implementation perspective on the one hand and the actual occurrence of successful implementation or implementation failure on the other. (Diagram 5).

Williams, of course, maintains that the realities of implementation phenomena result in a probability in favor of the combinations I and IV – the more an organization implements the implementation perspective the more it can count on successful implementation.

Two objections may be raised to this hypothesis. This seems to be the right place to point out that the use of an implementation perspective may be more symbolic than real; organizations that create special divisions or allocate substantial resources to implement the implementation perspective – conducting implementation analysis and assessment in the William's sense – may pay little attention to the findings from the implementation perspective and take no action to improve the real implementation of the objectives. Alternatively, the employment of an implementation perspective and the explicit search for strategies to improve implementation in *general* is certainly no guarantee that there will be implementation of a *particular* program. The concept of implementation is not the same as the concept of an implementation perspective; whether a policy or a set of objectives have been implemented or not depends on the existence of a state of affairs, which an organization may or may not correctly identify in its implementation perspective. It may be argued that the adoption of an implementation perspective will be conducive to implementation; actually, there is a growing body of propositions about the conditions that affect successful implementation – a *theory* of implementation in the making.

#### *Towards a theory of implementation*

If the implementation of an implementation perspective is of the importance to the implementation of objectives as Williams believes, then it must be asked more generally what the *necessary*

Diagram 5. *Contexts of implementation*

Participant's Point of View	Theoretician's Point of View	
	Successful Implementation	Implementation Failure
Presence of Implementation Perspective	I	II
Absence of Implementation Perspective	III	IV

and *sufficient conditions* for successful implementation are. The answer to this problem will depend upon the state of implementation theory. Maybe it is time to point out as a conclusion that a dynamic perspective on implementation – the concept of an implementation process – does not necessarily imply that implementation is regarded only as evolution. Nor does it imply a search for guidelines for successful implementation. In their article “Conditions of Effective Implementation: A Guide to Accomplishing Policy Objectives” P. Sabatier and D. Mazmanian apply the formal concept of implementation to the process of implementation asking for the sufficient conditions for successful implementation. Again, this task in implementation analysis goes beyond what SIA and ER are up to, because it asks not only if a policy has accomplished its objectives, but also what changes are conducive to policy improvement. Sabatier and Mazmanian state:

“The program is based on a sound theory relating changes in target group behaviour to the achievement of the desired end-state (objectives). The statute (or other basic policy decision) contains unambiguous policy directives and structures the implementation process so as to maximize the likelihood that target groups will perform as desired. The leaders of the implementing agencies possess substantial managerial and political skill and are committed to statutory goals. The program is actively supported by organized constituency groups and by a few key legislators (or the chief executive) throughout the implementation process, with the courts being neutral or supportive. The relative priority of statutory objectives is not significantly undermined over time by the emergence of conflicting public policies or by changes in relevant socioeconomic conditions that undermine the statute’s “technical” theory or political support.” (pp. 484–485)

The listing of these presumed sufficient conditions for successful implementation does identify crucial factors that affect policy accomplishment: policy technology, unambiguity of policy objectives, policy skill, policy support and policy consensus. However, it could be argued that it suffers from two weaknesses. (i) It begs the questions: what is “sound” policy technology? what is “substantial” policy skill? what is “enough” policy support? when is a policy “significantly” undermined by conflict? If the values of such crucial parameters in the policy implementation process are not specified any such listing of sufficient conditions is no

more than empty tautology: a policy will be implemented once it is a sound one, has enough support, power and dedication behind it. (ii) It bypasses findings from the study of processes of implementation: if implementation means interaction between objectives and outcome, if implementation is a process where by objectives are redefined and outcomes are reinterpreted, if implementation is a decision game requiring coalition formation, then it may very well be that the conditions put forward by Sabatier and Mazmanian are not to the point, because they model the policy process too rationally (May & Wildavsky 1979).

It is not quite clear what the addition of “successful” to “implementation” means: implementation could be described as a categorical phenomenon: either the objectives of a policy have been implemented or they have not. The concept of unsuccessful implementation would then be contradictory. However, a need to be able to talk about degrees of implementation may arise – at least in an ordinal sense – which would correspond to the notion of a possible ordering of phenomena along a scale from successful implementation to implementation failure. To speak of the conditions of implementation would thus come close to stating conditions for successful implementation.

A theory about the conditions for successful implementation may start from two distinctions. Firstly, there is the control aspect: a separation may be made between conditions that are under the control of the participants in the implementation process and conditions that are outside such control. Secondly, there is the actor focus: a distinction may be introduced between conditions pertaining to the formator and conditions relating to the implementor. Thus we have a convenient typology of *implementation conditions* (Diagram 6).

*Type of conditions I and II:* it is possible to devise a model of the implementation process in which the formator successfully implements a policy by having total control over both the *internal elements* of implementation – objectives, programs and implementors – and the *external situation* in which implementation takes place. In this model implementation is completely attributable to one of the parties in the implementation relation, an *asymmetrical* assignment of *implementation responsibility*.

The literature on how implementation actually takes place – be it more or less successful – has demolished the relevance of such a simple control

Diagram 6. *Implementation conditions*

Conditions Relating to Actor	Status of Conditions	
	Controllable	Uncontrollable
The Formator	I	II
The Implementor	III	IV

model. The objectives of a policy are often the result of a decision making process which nobody could claim to have controlled; programs may have a quite different appearance once they are in operation; the implementors may defy any attempt at tight control from the formator. Moreover, implementation takes place in an environment which may be very recalcitrant and difficult to control or predict. The asymmetrical model contains neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for successful implementation. Implementation of a policy involves *uncertainty* on the part of the formators both with regard to the internal and external elements of an implementation process. It is erroneous to see implementation as an action potentially controllable by the actors: implementation is a complex relationship between the formator(s) and the implementor(s), the occurrence of which depends on both internal and external factors in a volatile political context.

What the formator may contribute to successful implementation is far more limited than has been traditionally understood. By affecting the determination of objectives and the initiation of programs the formator is able to *influence* implementation. Obviously, the quality of the objectives and of the programs has a bearing on the possibility of successful implementation. Judgements about policy quality refer to both the *internal consistency* of objectives and programs as well as to the *external executability*. A distinction may be made between *ex ante* and *ex post* judgements; uncertainty is typical of the perspective of the formator. What may at first appear as attractive and practical could go wrong either because of unrecognized problems with the policy or because of a changing environment. Only to a limited extent is the behavior of the implementor part of the conditions that the formator may control. The findings from implementation research point to the crucial importance of *symmetry* in the imple-

mentation responsibility. The extent of the success of implementation is, of course, a function of the behavior of the implementor. If the policy is poor, then the implementor can do little to forward its chances of implementation; if on the other hand the policy is executable and realistic, then the motivation and behavior of the implementor is of fundamental importance.

Sometimes the choice of the implementor presents the formator with an opportunity to control the behavior of the implementor. Typically, the formator can only exercise some influence over the behavior of the implementor by means of various mechanisms of authority or exchange. The truth is that the implementor by taking action on his/her own may reduce the uncertainty typical of the formator, and thus reduce the internal inconsistency and external impracticability of the policy. Controlling the implementor is not a condition conducive to successful implementation.

*Type of conditions III and IV:* the implementor is constrained in two ways, on the one hand by the policy directives communicated by the formator and on the other by the exigencies of the environment. The implementor may have very little control over the ends and means of the policy which, if combined with dislike of the policy, may trigger a negative reaction causing implementation failure. Or the circumstances in which the implementor is to act may be such as to spell policy failure. It would seem to be the case that the more the implementor is able to control the greater the likelihood of successful implementation. However, this is the *instability* of the implementation phenomenon: the larger the set of conditions that the implementor controls the greater is the probability that the behavior of the implementor will affect the outcomes which may work both ways; more latitude in decision-making on the part of the implementor may be conducive to either successful implementation or to implementation failure; it will

present the implementor with the opportunity to move the policy closer to the environment, overcoming major faults or minor inadequacies in the original outline of the policy, but simultaneously such local discretion on the part of the implementor opens up the possibilities for reinterpreting of the policy. Implementation analysis must recognize the relevance of the concept of *reimplementation* to an understanding of how implementation failure may come about. The concept of reimplementation corresponds to the concept of reinvention in innovation theory: “*reinvention* is the degree to which an innovation is changed by the adopter in the process of adoption and implementation after its original development” (Rice & Rogers 1980:500–01).

One factor of basic importance to the efforts of the implementor is the behavior of the target group of the implementation endeavor (Smith 1973). The extent to which the target group is controllable by the implementor has a crucial bearing on the possibility of successful implementation. Of course, this partly depends upon the technology of the policy in question, its causal theory and the resources to be deployed in the implementation of the policy. It is also a function of the capacity of the implementor(s) to take independent action in order to overcome exigencies caused by the confrontation between policy and environment. Again, it must be emphasized that the implementor like the formator has to cope with uncertainty as to the implications of the environment for the implementability of the policy. Sheer luck though unworthy of recognition in any “perfect implementation” theory of implementation could make all the difference to policy accomplishment.

### Conclusion

It is not uncommon to find negative assessment of policy implementation or policy implementability in the literature. Typically, Helen Ingram states:

“The primary lesson that emerges from the existing literature on policy implementation is that a tremendous ravine filled with tangles and briars separates the statement of federal goals and objectives from their actual achievement in the field.” (Ingram 1977:524)

If implementation efforts are not bound to failure at the very least they face severe difficulties. It follows from the analysis of the concept of imple-

mentation that implementation is a complex phenomenon requiring that several variables *fit*: objectives and programs, policies and outcomes, formator(s) and implementor(s); what is intended must not be negated by the actual state of the world, the environment must not falsify the technology involved, and the implementor(s) must back the policy with motivation and adequate action.

However, to say that a number of facts must be true before there is implementation is not sufficient grounds for a general scepticism about the possibility of implementation. Theoretical arguments that have been adduced to the effect that the concept of implementation is internally inconsistent or that the notion of an implementation process only serves to pointing out the unfeasibility of implementation argue for the *limits* of policy implementability. These theoretical arguments can hardly be sustained if they are examined closely. It is possible to introduce clear and consistent basic concepts in implementation research just as successful implementation seems to be a possible real phenomenon. Policy implementability is a function of the extent to which the formator and the implementor recognize or control the implementation conditions – and of luck.

It has been argued that the implementation approach is basically an applied one; the purpose of an implementation analysis is to provide policy advice as to the improvement of outcomes. W. Williams states:

“The primary criterion for the worth of implementation studies is policy relevance. At basic issue is the extent to which implementation studies can yield ‘pertinent, sound, timely’ information to aid those who formulate and execute public policies. Even if others see the potential of implementation studies in more traditional scholarly dimensions, I am convinced a real academic pay off will come if researchers face up to the issue of policy relevance.” (Williams 1982:1)

What is questionable here is not the claim that implementation studies have often been undertaken for reasons of practical interest, nor the idea that implementation analysis like all evaluation studies may have direct relevance for public policy making, but the emphasis on policy relevance as *the* role or main function of implementation analysis. The implementation perspective focusses upon what happens to a decision once it is enacted; it is oriented towards the understanding of the

later stages of the decision process usually referred to as "policy execution", and it contains as a crucial part the assessment of the consequences of policy-making evaluating outcomes with regard to goals.

It seems vital for implementation analysis to distinguish between:

- (i) understanding of the decision-making process and the interpretation of the outcomes, and
- (ii) the practical policy lessons to be learnt.

The step from (i) – understanding and evaluation of policy execution – to (ii) – policy recommendation – is by no means an automatic one. Suppose that we know something about the extent to which the goals behind the creation of the Norrland University were achieved and in addition that we have some well supported hints about those factors which were conducive to the accomplishment of the goals (Lane 1983), are we then ipso facto inclined to come up with recommendations about how to create new universities, or how to achieve even higher levels of goal accomplishment in relation to the case studied? Is not the descriptive interest to focus on a unique process of institutional innovation and on the extent to which it could be said to be a success or failure enough? It appears that to provide well-supported arguments in favor of some policy execution description and of some outcome interpretation of the policy-making process is a task *sui generis*; to draw the "right" implications from a case study like this one is another task; the pros and cons of any such practical conclusions have to be decided on their own terms, and such deliberations are not to be confused with the careful, descriptive and evaluative analysis of a case study. It may be stated as a counter-argument to the Williams emphasis on policy relevance that policy description and evaluation is primary and policy recommendation secondary. If our understanding of the case is faulty or poor, how can we proceed to make policy relevant statements?

Hence, if the focus is to be placed upon the analysis of policy enactment and evaluation, the problems of evidence become acute. How are we to confirm statements about policy development and goal achievement? R. K. Yin states in *Studying Implementation* (1982):

"The research craft or methods associated with these implementation studies appear not to be rigidly defined or even very rigorous by standard laboratory or research criteria. Thus, for instance, a preanalysis step seems critical to the amassing of evidence but is rarely described; 'unstructured discussions' are a common source of evidence; multiple sources of evidence are commonly used, but the way the varied evidence is later merged is not a formalized procedure; and the culminating step – explanation building and testing – seems to follow few methodological guidelines." (Yin 1982:61)

Considering the great variety of implementation studies – higher education reforms of admission criteria, creation of new universities, urban renewal programs, local government innovations, criminal policies and so on – it is no wonder that there is no methodology typical of the implementation perspective. Given the often highly salient nature of implementation processes it also comes as no surprise that an experimental design is out of the question. Indeed, implementation studies tend to belong to the set of analyses employing soft methods by preference. Though quantitative evidence may loom large in the analysis of policy development and evaluation, there is sometimes not much strict statistical reasoning. Yin's description of the state of the craft of implementation analysis is very much to the point, but his conclusion appears somewhat hasty. Yin states:

"Added to the integrity of the basic facts of the implementation experience was another feature that increased the credibility of a study. This was the researcher's recognition of different points of view by the various participants in the implementation experience." (Yin 1982:63)

"Finally, internal credibility was bolstered by the knowledge that the participants in the implementation experience could and did have an opportunity to voice their opinions about the researcher's findings." (Yin 1982:63)

So much for the concept of *internal* credibility; Yin, however, also employs another concept, that of *external* credibility, to discuss the evidential nature of implementation analyses:

"External credibility, in contrast to internal credibility, is based on *inferences* about a study, how it was conducted, and the researcher's previous work. For the exemplary studies, credibility in the results and conclusions was especially enhanced by two external criteria: the researcher's reputation for scholarly endeavors and the broad

level of effort involved in conducting the study.” (Yin 1982:64)

If Yin is right, then the implementation perspective would be sui generis having special confirmatory conditions besides the standard notion of “a clear factual account of the implementation experience”, such as:

- recognition of the points of view of the various participants
- opportunity for the participants to voice their opinions
- external criteria for confirmation.

These difficulties in arriving at an implementation judgement should not be exaggerated into the requirement of special credibility conditions for implementation analysis. Any scholar dealing with the ends and means of human behavior faces similar difficulties in stating what the goals are, how the means were perceived and what might constitute outcomes relevant to the ends and means. When the goals and the outcomes are not easily identifiable because they are ambiguous or the targets of conflict between the participants, then the scholar may do better simply to operate with the various interpretations of the goals and the outcomes of the participants. This, however, gives carte blanche to the idea that any opinion of the participants is valid and deserves the attention of the scholar. The application of the concept of implementation in implementation studies does not require special confirmatory conditions, nor is the concept of a mainly practical relevance.

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