

Pressman, J. & Wildavsky, A. (1984). *Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in Oakland; or, Why It's Amazing that Federal Programs Work at All, This Being a Saga of the Economic Development Administration as Told by Two Sympathetic Observers Who Seek to Build Morals on a Foundation of Ruined Hopes.* University of California Press.

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Abstract:

This book highlights a case study of federal program in Oakland that started in 1965. The Economic Development Administration conducted the program and their goal was to help stimulate Oakland's economy by creating sustainable jobs and completing a multitude of Public Works projects. The project had a lot of potential however it was ultimately unsuccessful. The authors dissect the project and give their recommendations for future cases of implementation.

My assessment of book includes the recommendations given by the author and compares them to some of the their peers in the field of Public Administration.

Key Concepts:

- Implementation is divorced from policy.
- Implementation is evolutionary, not revolutionary.
- Good intentions and money alone do not make a policy work.
- Implementation is one of the more difficult steps in the policy cycle, however it seems to get the least amount of attention.

Summary

In this book, Pressman and Wildavsky are pioneering the issue of implementation as a study. For their study, they profiled the Economic Development Agency and its task to rejuvenate Oakland, a city that was on the verge of joining in on the recent trend of riots that were taking place around the country.

In 1965, the Public Works and Economic Development Act was passed. The Act granted the EDA the funds to help stimulate the economy of a devastated city by creating public work projects that would in turn create jobs. Eugene Foley, an EDA official took exception to Oakland. Foley not only brought in federal funds, he also brought an enthusiasm for the Oakland project that was unrivaled. Foley declared four major projects: an airport hanger (\$10,650,000), a marine terminal (\$10,125,000), a port industrial park (\$2,100,000), and an access road to the coliseum (\$414,000) (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984, p. 30). There were other projects added later. Similar projects had been successful in rural areas, and Foley wanted that same success for the Oakland project.

The project started to falter when they began to experience delays. Deals that had been made with outside companies were being compromised by new cost estimates. The EDA was beginning to find out the difference between working in a rural area versus an urban one. As the delays began to pile up, there were also management changes. Eugene Foley resigned in 1966 and with him left the enthusiasm that fueled the project. The partnering groups had already received their fee payments from the EDA. Their incentive to fulfill promises of providing black jobs was compromised and as time passed and commitments waned, the project provided few jobs and eventually went away.

Wildavsky and Pressman used this case study and formulated their theories as to why they think the project, which had an enormous amount of potential, ultimately failed. Their theory was that implementation could not be successful if it is divorced from planning. They first pointed to the complexity of joint action. There was no doubt that all the players felt that getting blacks jobs in the bay area was important, however the problem came with the “how” and “how long”. Where Foley felt that results needed to come swiftly, others did not and their work reflected it, leading to many of the delays. Brevity was a recurring theme in this case as Foley had to spend \$23 million in four months. The group had to make haste decisions, which resulted in haste planning.

The authors also point out that there were too many unknown steps that needed to be taken to be successful and the more steps that need to be done, the more chances there are to fail. There were many people involved in the project that knew facts about how to implement policy, however they lacked individuals that knew how to make things happen. The project lacked the leadership to get the project out of delays, especially after Foley resigned.

Wildavsky and Pressman did a good job of detailing how implementation needs to be carried out and they use the Oakland case study to show that a good policy is more than a good plan and enthusiasm. The next half of the paper will delve deeper into those steps and challenge them amongst some of the other theories we have learned this semester.

Analysis

Wildavsky and Pressman's suggestions for good implementation echo many of the theories that we have discussed in class. According to authors, good implementation must begin in the actual planning of the policy (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984, 136-7). Policy makers tend to divorce themselves from the actual implementation of their policy and as a result they misestimate the amount of time and detail that is required to be successful. This comes in many forms. Wildavsky and Pressman note leaders make decisions and in thinking about the finish line, often fail to contemplate all the intricacies of getting there. They expect those under them to figure out the sequence of events. Another form was highlighted in the Oakland case.

Eugene Foley had the best intentions. Some may argue that he made the best decision that he could with the information he had. Some may argue that Foley acted with bounded rationality. Foley had seen the program work before, he had funds, and he had an energized staff that he felt that he could trust. Others may not argue that. Foley clearly had his emotions involved, which made have had some effect on his judgment. Woodrow Wilson would have argued that rationality without emotions lead to more practical decisions (Gen, lecture, October 31, 2007). Had Foley stepped away and really thought out the implementation on the Oakland project he would have noticed a few key things that would have changed the way that he would have approached the project.

Implementation is an evolutionary process, not a revolutionary. There must always be evaluation and tweaking occurring for implementation to be successful. This must be an ongoing process or the project will hit a wall and may not recover. Wildavsky and Pressman argued that the Oakland project was not allowed to evolve. There was no

room for evaluation and tweaking because everything was so focused on time consumption. No one stopped to realize that if the players stopped and planned better that they would have saved much more time because there would have been less delays.

First, he would have noticed that Oakland was not a devastated area. Wildavsky and Pressman compared Oakland to Appalachia, a region that is 10 times the size of Switzerland yet it had no infrastructure. Oakland on the other hand was a pocket surrounded by thriving areas and though the project may be able to create jobs, there is a larger chance that the people who need them will not get them. The jobs would go to more skilled workers that live only a short drive away (pp.152, 3).

Second, the project would have reworked its contracts with collaborating businesses. They were making deals that would grant the company low cost loans and in exchange, the company would promise to hire x number of jobs for the targeted population. This does not work because the company already spends the money and it is difficult to hire a particular number of a particular demographic of worker. Difficulties then arise when money is spent but the promise is not fulfilled. The plan was flawed and an alternative that would have been more beneficial was to subsidize the companies payroll once they hired the desired population (p. 159).

There were other issues with the plan and some were not so easy to spot, however, I believe Wilson would have argued that if the group would have used rational reasoning, it would have forced them to take these issues into account. They would have noticed that they were comparing Oakland, which is not a devastated region according to the criteria given, to an incommensurable region (Gen, lecture slides, October 31, 2007). The haste of the project ultimately led to the bulk of the delays.

Wildavsky and Pressman took exception to the amount of delays and quantified them to be 233-1/3 weeks of delay. The longer the players take to implement the policy the more difficult it is to be successful. Eugene Bardach (1995) takes exception to this notion. In his book, The Implementation Game: What Happens after a Bill Becomes a Law, Bardach argues that the Wildavsky and Pressman do not go far enough with their assessment of the delays that plagued Oakland. Bardach calls for the authors to identify implementation processes that may in fact undermine the integrity of the policy (Theodoulou & Cahn, 1994, p. 138). He argues that sometimes delays are not only sometimes needed, but are also required to get the best results. Where Wildavsky and Pressman want implementation to be a smooth process with as few steps as possible, Bardach believes that there should be some level of conflict between players trying to attain “control”. Bardach states that “control is exercised through bargaining, persuasion, and maneuvering under conditions of uncertainty” (p. 138). Bardach believes that this struggle between players results in attention to detail and thus, better ideas for implementation. Giandomenico Majone echoes Bardach’s argument. Majone argues that persuasion should be utilized in all of the processes of policy making. He feels that discussion mobilizes knowledge and ultimately leads to better policy making decisions (Waite, 2007).

Wildavsky and Pressman also acknowledge that there is a wedge between decision makers and the people who implement those decisions. The authors point out that the process carries an elitist feel. The decisions are handed down from those in power and they focus on the end goal, however they are not aware of the steps that need to be taken to get there. They leave that part up to subordinates. All the while, the

subordinates need resources to carry out the implementation plan and that usually forces them to ask the people in power for their funds. Wildavsky and Pressman say it best:

The view from the top is exhilarating. Divorced from problems of implementation, federal bureau heads, leaders of international agencies, and prime ministers in poor countries think great thoughts together. But they have trouble imagining a sequence of events that will bring their ideas to fruition. Other men, they believe, will tread the path once they have so brightly lit the way. Few officials down below...[are] able to ask whether there is more than a rhetorical connection between between the word and the deed (136-7).

Putnam describes the elite as self-indulgent group whom pride themselves on not answering to anyone (1976). The elitist mentality leads to many blunders in implementation. It makes the implementer more dependent on the elite, or in this case the policy maker. Eugene Foley was not an elitist in the sense that he was a rich monarch or an overpowering fascist wing of a government. What allows some to classify Foley as an elitist is that the Oakland project was very dear to him and it seemed as if he would not allow others to care for it the way that he did. All decisions had to go through him, he did not consult the mayor of Oakland on his plans until it was set into motion, and he did things the way that he wanted to do them. Instead of garnering support for what should have been a huge success, he built apathy and resentment, and it showed when he resigned. Foley was the driving force for the Oakland project, even in the wake of all the delays (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984, p. 31). When he left, there was no one there to

stimulate the project the way that he did. The sense of urgency that was once there had vanished and projects had eventually wilted away.

In challenging the theories of Wildavsky and Pressman, one could look at the war in Iraq. There was a policy handed down from an elite figure and the end view was made clear to public. The goal was originally to find weapons of mass destruction however it evolved into spreading democracy. The president handed down his orders with the end in sight but the steps in the middle were not clearly defined. There is no clear cut plan to spread democracy in Iraq or to get our soldiers out. Sure people debate ways to do it, but there is no plan.

Personal Assessment

In my opinion, Wildavsky and Pressman are correct. The implementation process should receive much more attention. I do notice that the authors have the luxury of hindsight and that there are times when decisions need to be made swiftly. Nonetheless, some of the theories that supported theirs came before the Oakland case study. They just applied them. Implementation is difficult to execute because it does not carry the same appeal as agenda setting. There is no glory to be whom in implementation, only to be lost. There are no cameras that tape the 'implementation creation' process. No one wants to hear about it. They take the same approach as the person that handed down the policy in the case of the elites: they expect results and they expect someone else to come up with the how to do it.

Woodrow Wilson comes to mind when reviewing this case study. Many argue that his style of removing emotion from the decision making process is impossible, and it

might be impossible to totally remove it. However, there must be a time when unbiased logic is utilized. Organizations consult with third parties that have no emotional connection to the ultimate goal because they can think more rationally.

Foley had a great idea. It surprised me to read this book. I grew up in the area and there are times where there seemed to be no hope, no guidance. I was truly touched by what he wanted to do. However, his failure to execute properly now makes it that much more difficult. I think that many can learn from this book and hopefully do some good with it.

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