

**THE COOPERATIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN POLITICAL
OFFICE-BEARERS AND SENIOR OFFICIALS IN POLICY
IMPLEMENTATION**

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary government and administration, policy is made by both politicians and officials in a co-operative and interactive manner. Policy making takes place on four different levels and will always result in policy which must be implemented to achieve specific determined objectives. Policy implementation as the second step in the policy process should not be thought of in mechanistic terms, i.e. that the municipal council makes policy and that the officials merely implement such policy. Policy making is a continuous process which goes hand-in-hand with policy implementation and requires a co-operative, collaborative partnership between political office-bearers (councillors) and officials in the local sphere of government. Such interaction is best seen in the making and implementation of executive policy in local sphere of government. The purpose of this paper is to look into the nature of this relation in implementing policy

INTRODUCTION

A policy can be seen as a **declaration of intent**. It states the objectives of the policy makers. Policies are like roadmaps in that they indicate where the policy makers want to go and “what” they want to achieve: Policy is thus future oriented and **time** and **place** bound. Policy relates to various

processes, Public policy is a decision embodied in legislation or an action of a government. The policy-making process can be either top- down (initiated by government) or bottom-up (initiated by citizens). While the various forces that shape the daily lives of citizens today are global in nature, it is in the sphere of local government that public policies and programmes affect the lives of citizens directly.

Health services, public transport, water and sanitation, beaches and amusement facilities, parks and recreation are only some of the areas that are under local government control. Policy making is not exercised in a vacuum by the politicians, but is in fact linked to the realities of the services which are rendered. No service can be rendered effectively and efficiently without a policy. Policy making is *par excellence* the thought process on the nature and scope of the services rendered within a specific area.

It is also a vision of “what” to do, “where” to do it, “when”, “how” will render the services. Within the guidelines laid down by the executive policy the chief officials will have ample opportunity and discretion to interpret the executive policy and to determine a departmental policy and related work programmes. Various activities must thus be carried out before services can be rendered. It is thus the purpose of this paper to describe and explain the nature and place of policy implementation in the public policy process. The following aims will be dealt with. Firstly, the nature of and place of policy implementation will be describes and explained.

Secondly, planning as a step in policy implementation will be discussed. Thirdly programming, which follows planning will be discussed and

fourthly project management will be discussed. Lastly the cooperative, interaction between political office bearers and senior officials will be described and explained.

1. NATURE AND PLACE OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN POLICY PROCESS

Hanekom (1987:54) writes that policy implementation is a complicated process, with legal prescriptions, and administrative possibilities. The needs, interests and expectations of citizens must be taken into account. Put it simply policy implementation is defined as a complicated process concerned with the attainment of objectives set out in a policy statement. Implementation can be seen as a policy-action continuum which takes place at a specific moment in time and which results in interaction and consultation between the three main groups of participants, i.e. the political office-bearers, senior officials and the citizens.

It is often seen as a struggle between those who wish to see the intention of the policy being executed, those who execute the policy and those who receive the services (Meiring, 2001:66). Implementation can be regarded as a process of learning in which knowledge is obtained, the policy explained, amended and extended to continuously meet the changing needs, expectations and interests of citizens.

Cloete *et al.* (2006:180) is of the opinion that together with policy development and evaluation, policy implementation forms one of the important pillars on which the policy process is based. As such, effective implementation is the final test for policy to be effective. Policy

implementation is a multifaceted concept, attempted at various spheres of government and pursued in conjunction with the private sector, civil society and interests groups. In this partnership, strategy generation and are vital ingredients in the policy-implementation interface, and various implementation instruments have emerged, such as planning, strategy generation, programme management, project management, operations management, contracting and privatisation as well as various forms of public-private partnerships.

According to Cloete *et al.* (2006:182) there are five interlinked critical explanatory variables, also known as the 5-C protocol, identified by scholars of policy implementation which are the following:

- The *content* of the policy itself – what it sets out to do (i.e. goals); how directly it relates to the issue (i.e. causal theory); how it aims to solve the perceived problem (i.e. methods)
- The nature of the *institutional context* – the corridor (often structured as standard operating procedures) through which policy must travel, and by whose boundaries it is limited, in the process of implementation
- The *commitment* of those entrusted with carrying out the implementation at various levels to the goals, causal theory, and methods of the policy
- The *administrative capacity* of implementers to carry out the changes desired of them

- The *support of clients* and coalitions whose interests are enhanced or threatened by the policy, and the strategies they employ in strengthening or deflecting its implementation

Cloete (1986:56) also writes that policy making in short is the setting and publication of objectives. The objectives set in for example the executive policy, must eventually be written in an easily communicated format, in order that the subordinate personnel will know exactly what the nature and scope of the operational functions will be. After the political office-bearers have made the executive policy, the officials may commence with the required implementation, to render the services to the citizens.

The work that is done by public officials can for study purposes be divided into six different but inseparate processes, namely the

- policy process;
- financial process;
- organizational process;
- personnel process;
- procedure process; and
- control process

The policy process can be divided into the following three consecutive steps:

- policy making
- policy implementation
- policy analysis and evaluation (Meiring, 2001:68)

Policy implementation is thus a major step in the policy process and can be described as "... what happens after laws are passed authorizing a program, a policy ... or some kind of tangible output ... The term refers to the set of activities that follows statement of intent ... "Ripley and Franklin, 1982:4). These activities are known as the executive functions, which follows the legislative functions. Cutchin (1981:49) maintains for example that policy implementation aims"... to put policy or programme into operation." Implementation refers to the translation of the objectives and ideas of the ruling party on how to govern the country, into the setting of specific priorities which are usually reflected in the national budget (as specific items)".

Policy implementation can thus be seen as the activation of various functions and programmes. Ripley and Franklin (1982:4) write that the implementation stage would involve specific sequential steps as: (1) design a programme incorporating task sequences and clear statements of objectives, performance standards, cost and timing; (2) execution of programme..." However, a more holistic analysis will show that policy implementation starts firstly with an interpretation by the senior officials of the executive policy, explaining of such policy to all subordinate officials to ensure that objectives are achieved and that the required services are rendered effectively.

Policies must be communicated to all those concerned with the implementation. Secondly, all subordinate officials must not only have a clear understanding of what is expected, but they must be enabled on a

continuous basis to render the expected services. Any existing department is rendering services on a continuous basis, according to existing policy

However, policy can change which require that the existing means/ resources ought to be analysed and re-evaluated to ensure that such means/ resources will continue to enable subordinates to render services effectively.

When policy changes the senior officials ought to ensure that the existing

- departmental policy is in line with the new executive policy
- organizational structure and posts will remain effected
- personnel will have the necessary knowledge, skills and aptitude to perform the work effectively
- financial resources will be sufficient to finance the changed functions and services
- procedures and methods will be adequate to render the services; and
- control measures and standards will be sufficient to ensure effective controlling

Thirdly, the municipal managers ought to ensure that the subordinate officials perform the operational work, to render services, as effectively and efficiently as possible. This requires that all means/ resources be utilized effectively and efficiently. The utilization of the means/ resources entails the performance of specific management functions. The management functions can be classified into various categories for example planning, organizing, and controlling.

However, there are other functions that have been proposed such as directing, leading, performance management, motivation, monitoring and evaluation and communications. In this paper, due to time constraints only planning, programming and project management will be dealt with.

2. NATURE OF PLANNING IN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Planning requires the determination of the “most” effective and efficient method of action to attain the objectives that have been set in the policy. By planning an attempt is made to obtain the “best” possible or “most” advantageous (measured in minimum cost and maximum service or output) method of action chosen from various alternatives. Starling (1977:126) writes that “planning is reasoning about how an organization will get where it wants to go. Its essence is to see opportunities and threats in the future and to exploit or combat them by decisions taken in the present”.

It can therefore be deduced that planning relates to future action and that the set policy serves a basis, in that the policy lays down the boundaries within which the planning is to take. In planning attention is given to the:

- identification and interpretation of the objectives as set out in the policy;
- determining of ways to accomplish/ attain objectives;
- determining of possible alternative courses of action for the attainment of the objectives; and the
- selection of the best possible alternative

From this it can be deduced that planning relates to specific activities that must be carried out to find the best course of action to achieve policy objectives (Cloete, 1975: 27). All human however takes place in a specific environment which is place and time bound. In planning it is not only necessary to determine the “most” effective and efficient way to render public services, but also to link such activities to time schedule and preference order. Such action results in programming the activities.

3. NATURE OF PROGRAMMING IN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Gildenhuis (2004:194) argues that “after deciding on a political policy, an executive policy and operational policy, it follows logically that the policy must be implemented. The next logical step, therefore, is to compile an operational programme for implementation by the relevant organizational unit of government, for realizing the policy goals and objectives. The policy is usually defined in vague terms. It is the task of the programmer to cast it into concrete terms for proper execution”.

Cloete (1981:168) writes that a programme is “... a set of specific actions which must be undertaken separately or simultaneously to reach a specific policy goal or to implement a plan”. During programming an attempt is made to obtain the “best” sequence for performing the activities within a specific time span. Programming results in the determining of a programme. A programme has two main characteristics, namely

- classified, scheduled activities; and a
- time calculation for the completion of each activity
(Meiring, 2001:71).

Programming is thus aimed at:

- ensuring that all activities contribute to attainment of the (already) determined objectives;
- ensuring that all activities are logically set out and described;
- serving as a means of communication to convey complicated ideas/ plans to workgroups; and
- serving as a means of control for the execution of a policy

Programming is defined as a process in which detailed designing for the rendering of services is done and in which the nature, sequence and time duration of purposeful activities are determined. The following steps can be identified:

- interpretation of the objectives set out in the executive and departmental policy;
- determining the activities to be performed to attain the operational objectives;
- determining the mutual relationships between identified objectives;
- determining the logical sequence for activities to take place;
- grouping of related activities into tasks and projects;
- determining the time for the completion of each activity; and
- determining the total time for the completion of all activities and thus all tasks and projects (Meiring, 2001:72)

It can be deduced that the global processes of making a policy and ends with the programme which is then to be implemented operationally. Two phases can be observed in the implementation of policy, i.e.

- planning and programming phases, and the
- programme implementation phase (Meiring, 2001:73 and Basi, 1968:23).

The first phase is concerned with the initiation of action in that the broad and sometimes vague (policy) objectives are transformed into practicable operational action. The second phase contains the activating of work programmes and comprises in fact the operational activities which are undertaken to render public services (Basi, 1968:23) and (Thornhill and Hanekom, 1979: 51). The implementation of work programmes is thus the mobilization o resources into specific outputs – the public services.

4. PROJECT MANAGEMENT AS A COMPONENT OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Craythorne (2006:308) writes that project management is a tool to achieve results in realizing a municipality's vision, strategies, goals, objectives and planning. Project management is designed to make better use of existing resources by getting the work to flow horizontally as well as vertically within the organization. The contemporary local government is expected to provide the greatest measure of physical, social and psychological security possible for its inhabitants; a complex task in the expanding and developing societies of today.

Furthermore, available resources are not increasing as rapidly as the demands being placed upon them. Such a state of requires that administrative and operational activities should occur in an orderly manner for successful achievement of the desired objectives. Technological developments and knowledge increases have provided a number of techniques and tools which make it possible for more systematic and local approach than was possible in the past, to decisions concerning allocation and utilization of scarce resources. Project management is one approach or a technique to be applied by the senior officials in implementing development plans and programmes.

Project management consists of the following sequential steps:

- project conception
- project formulation
- project implementation
- project evaluation.

During the implementation phase, the actual work of carrying out the project commences and traditional functions of a municipal manager (e.g. use of resources, leadership, motivation etc) come to fore. A significant function of the officials during the implementation phase is that of supervision and control. Supervision and control procedures are required in order to constantly monitor progress, or lack thereof, in attaining project milestones within the given timeframes.

It can be deduced that policy implementation is an important step in the policy process because it makes the political intentions set out in laws and

visions of politicians real. It can also be deduced that policy implementation consists of specific functions which must be performed.

5. COOPERATION BETWEEN POLITICAL OFFICE-BEARERS AND SENIOR OFFICIALS

The roles of the political office bearers and the chief officials are inseparably linked in practice and difficult to separate. Kramer (1981:398) writes that contemporary” ... public administration recognizes that public policy making involves both political and administrative components. Friedrick and Mason (1940:401) “politics and administration play a continuous role in both formation and execution, though there is probably more politics in the formation of policy, and more administration in the execution of it”. Carson and Harris also work that “more recent text writers have defined public administration as all those operations having for their purpose the fulfillment or enforcement of public policy’ ... and ... it was widely held that public administration is concerned only with the execution of public policies, which are determined by political officers”

It is still not unusual even today to hear such statements as: councilors make policy and officials carry it out. However, this is not correct. Today it is recognized that public administrators play a vital role in the preparation, formulation, making and implementation of policy because in the contemporary state policy is made on various levels, namely the

- political policy making level – where political parties make their political policy

- executive policy making level – where the members of a legislative assembly make legislation
- departmental policymaking level – where senior officials makes departmental policy in addition to the existing executive policy; and
- operational policy making level – where the operational managers make operational policy in addition to the departmental policy.

A cooperative interaction thus exists between political office bearers and senior officials, especially in the making of executive policy and departmental policy. The previous dispensation had created a rigid setting in which the roles of councillors and officials were fairly obvious and distinctly separate. The new dispensation created democratic municipalities with a new ‘generation’ of councillors and officials, with different values and loyalties. The success of the new dispensation in local government will depend on whether their relationship contributes to mutual trust, dedication, accountability and productivity.

According to Ismail *et al.* (1997:160) officials draft the policy proposals for submission to their councils. Given their technical expertise, they advise councillors regarding appropriate policy positions. However, it is still the councillor’s responsibility to take the final decisions on policy matters. Councillors and officials together constitute the management of a municipality. The quality of their relationship is therefore a critical factor in effective local government. The relationship between the chief officials (in particular the Municipal Manager) and political office-bearers (councillors) is especially important for a successful partnership between the political and administrative wings of municipalities. Chief officials especially the

Municipal Manager must uphold council's values and build an organizational culture within the municipality that promotes effectiveness, productivity, high morale and a sound work ethic.

Councillors, in turn, need to have confidence and trust in the chief official's ability to provide sound administrative leadership. Councillors do not possibly have in-depth knowledge of all the specialized and professional aspects of municipal affairs. Councillors largely rely on the quality and objectivity of reports received from officials. Councillors have to up recommendations from officials with community needs and interests. A council resolution is therefore a mixture of political considerations and expert advice.

Councillors and officials are, to this extent, partners in determining policy and direction. The quality of their relationship – in terms of trust, honesty and integrity – largely determines the quality of council policy. Working with councilors is very much part of chief official's daily tasks. Chief officials professional expertise and their intimate knowledge of local infrastructure and council resources enable them to evaluate policy and advice on the probability of achieving goals.

Chief officials are expected to carry out policy decisions in a cost-efficient, effective and customer-friendly manner. They must also demonstrate that decisions are in the best interests of the community. For this to happen, officials must understand community needs, display a constructive and sensitive approach to the political considerations of the time, and understand the transformation imperatives. Chief officials, however, do not have the

luxury of being indifferent to party politics. This sometimes makes their task more difficult. The chief officials in particular the Municipal Manager plays a key role in analyzing the political climate and should therefore be conversant with the viewpoints of all parties represented in council.

The Municipal Manager should also be aware of the undercurrents within council be able to present a range of alternatives to council in any situation. Chief officials need to understand politician's value system in order to effectively evaluate, interpret and execute council policy. Within the bureaucracy, chief officials have to steer the political transition process internally. It is vital that councillors and chief officials develop consensus on a shared set of values and a common vision. The dilemma in many municipalities is that the values of officials and councillors do not necessarily meet. This results in mistrust, scepticism, negativity and low morale. Correcting this disharmony is a priority for councillors and officials alike.

6. Conclusion

To conclude then we can say that policy can be seen as unit (a whole) consisting of various components/ parts which relate to various participants and steps that must be carried out by councillors and officials. There often needs to be personal interaction between councillors and senior officials, particularly regarding, access to and provision of information, to effectively integrate policy making, implementation and service delivery. This has created a need for guidelines that help councillors and officials to understand fully their respective roles and how they should operate, in order to perform their job effectively.

The Municipal Structures Act no. 117 of 1998 and the Municipal Systems Act no. 32 of 2000 recognise that the relationship between the political office-bearers and officials is crucial for effective local governance. The overall aim of the acts is to promote a collaborative working relationship between councillors and officials. The acts also provide for distinctly different yet complementary roles for councillors and officials.

Councillors are elected to represent local communities on municipal councils and to meet the priority needs of communities by providing services equitably, effectively and sustainably within the means of the municipality. Officials on the other hand must at all times loyally execute the lawful policies of the municipal council, perform the functions of office in good faith, diligently, honestly and in a transparent manner. Effective policy implementation requires a close working relationship between councillors and officials, in maintaining a high level of integrity in municipal affairs which is necessary for proper policy implementation.

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