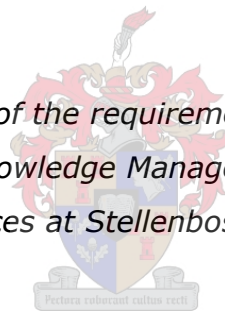


Sensemaking Dimensions of Policy Implementation: Issues, Concepts, and Perspectives

By

Mankgogele Thabo Kgwete

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Supervisor: Dr C. H. Maasdorp

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Declaration

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Dedicated to my daughter, Katlego Lechaba – for all the time that I did not spend quality time with you. The assistance and guidance of my teacher and supervisor, Dr Christiaan Maasdorp, is acknowledged.

Summary

The presumption in conventional theories of implementation is that implementing agents understand what policymakers are asking of them. These assumptions lose sight of the complexity of human sensemaking. The thesis draws on multiple interpretative paradigms to demonstrate how the social dimensions underlying crucial strategic variables come together to influence the sensemaking of actors involved in implementing policy.

A conceptual analysis of concepts and insights from implementation studies, sensemaking, knowledge management and new institutional theory is used to underscore the need to take account of implementation actors' sensemaking. This will allow us to look beyond their actions as informed by their duties and mandated by policy prescripts. The focus is on how grassroots actors construct meaning of policy, interpret their own actions with regard to the spirit and intention of policy, and make inferences about probable behavioural changes as a result. Conceptualising the challenges of implementation in this way enables us to explore the mechanisms by which local actors construct the meaning of policy, and we see how this process gives rise to changes in practice, ostensibly facilitating both understanding and behaviour.

The thesis shows that the involvement of grassroots actors in policy formulation can enhance their enthusiasm and commitment to policy intentions. It is also shown how such participation affects implementing agencies and agents' sensemaking and sensegiving, and the degree to which they understand what is required of them. Viewing policy implementation through this lens reveals new insights into how we can articulate implementation activities; and it can also counsel us on how inferences drawn from behavioural change can complement implementer agents' execution by means of sensemaking through action.

Opsomming

Die aanname van konvensionele implementeringsteorie is dat implementeringsagente verstaan wat beleidmakers van hulle vra. Sulke aannames verloor sig van die ingewikkeldheid van menslike sinmaak prosesse. Die tesis gebruik veelvuldige interpretasie raamwerke om te beskryf hoe die sosiale dimensies van belangrike strategiese veranderlikes saam die sin-maak proses van die betrokkenes by die implementering van beleid te beïnvloed.

'n Konseptuele analise van konsepte en insigte uit implementeringstudies, singewingsprosesse, kennisbestuur en nuwe institusionele teorie word gebruik om te beklemtoon hoe belangrik dit is om implementeringsagente se sinmaak proses in gedagte te hou. Dit stel ons in staat om dieper te kyk as om hul optrede bloot te sien as 'n gevolg van hul pligte en beleidsvoorskrifte. Daar word gefokus op hoe grondvlakagente die betekenis van beleid aktief konstrueer, hul eie optrede interpreteer met betrekking tot die gees en bedoeling van beleid, en afleidings maak oor waarskynlike gedragsveranderings as gevolg van beleid. Deur die uitdagings van implementering op hierdie manier te konseptualiseer, kan ons die meganismes ondersoek waardeur plaaslike akteurs die betekenis van beleid konstrueer, en kan ons sien hoe hierdie proses aanleiding gee tot veranderinge in die praktyk, wat oënskynlik begrip en gedrag vergemaklik.

Die tesis dui aan hoe die betrokkenheid van akteurs by beleidsformulering op voetsoolvlak hulle entoesiasme en toewyding tot beleidsvoornemens kan verhoog. Verder word beskryf hoe sodanige deelname die implementeringsagente se singewing- en sinmaak-prosesse beïnvloed, asook die mate waartoe hulle verstaan wat van hulle vereis word. Deur beleidsimplementering deur hierdie lens te sien, word nuwe insigte openbaar oor hoe ons implementeringsaktiwiteite kan verwoord; en verkry ons ook insig oor hoe implementeringagente se afleidings uit gedragsverandering aangevul kan word deur aksie-gedrewe sinmaakprosesse.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The environment in which policy designers and implementing agencies operates in South Africa enjoins them to actively involve the target community in the delivery of programs and services through a process of consultation. As an example, municipalities, as implementing agents, are required by law to ensure close integration and co-ordination among role players, activities and programmes as encapsulated in the principal strategic planning document, called Integrated Development Plan (IDP).¹ Co-ordination refers to both internal (intra-organisational) and external (local communities and upper echelons of governance structures at provincial and national level) stakeholders. In addition to informing all financial planning and budgeting undertaken by a municipality, IDP identifies priorities such as “allocation of scarce resources to areas of greatest need; democratising local government by ensuring full participation in its planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes”; and using available capacity effectively.

Internal and external stakeholders identified in the IDP are part of coalitions of shifting groups whose structures, activities and interests bring to bear such strong influence that they can be said to constitute environmental factors. This means that policy developers, implementing agencies and implementing agents have to deal with a mixture of disparate information. On this account, greater openness to input from the environment entails that policy actors should be most concerned with sensemaking in order to deal with what is “out there” and what is “in here” (Scott, 1987; in Weick, 1995, p.72). This openness concurrently brings with it the recognition that structures, processes, and the environment of policy implementation, are more ambiguous than what one might suppose; which comes with a greater premium on the processes by which policy actors construct meaning.

A review of the literature on policy implementation in the next chapter demonstrates that reference to and usage of concepts like policy, institutional capacity, strategy, consultation, accountability, participation in planning, successful implementation, (and what it means to have satisfactory service delivery) assume different meanings among the multiple players,

¹ Legislation defines the nature of the IDP in: a) Constitution of RSA Act 10 of 1996; Municipal Act 32 of 2000; Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003; and Municipal Planning and Performance Management Regulation (2001)

who function at various operational levels and over varied elapsed time intervals. A review of the literature will also show that determining what constitutes successful policy implementation is also a contested terrain, even among scholars of policy implementation.

Najam's (1995) 5Cs Protocol model and Matland's (1995) Ambiguity and Conflict model are used to illustrate theories and concepts around policy implementation. The models help us to identify and unravel the limited understanding of the dynamics around organisational policy implementation. Crucial aspects from the aforementioned models and their interactions are then analysed from the perspective of Weick's (1995) theory of organisational sensemaking. Organisational sensemaking, in this context, is understood as a theory about how organisational members construct intersubjective meaning to navigate their shared social reality (Weick, 1995).

The basis for choosing concepts from sensemaking to examine policy implementation is inspired by Watslawick's (1976) proposition that the ease with which tentative exposition of implementation outputs take hold in our minds and endure, underscores the importance of the need to clarify crucial aspects of implementation and conditions under which sensemaking is initiated, and to identify what resources are available for elaborations (in Weick, 1995, p.84). The purpose of using sensemaking theory in this research is to explore a viable mechanism to examine policy implementation activities in a way that is broad, richer and different from current convectional literature that does not explain how actors behave when overwhelmed by 'equivocality and conflict' of policy implementation.

1.2 Purpose

This study identifies and analyses the crucial aspects of the policy implementation process that are deemed vital for effective implementation, as well as explores the interactions and interrelationships of the various players who are directly and indirectly engaged in policy development and implementation. Drawing from multiple interpretative paradigms, as well as recent implementation studies, the thesis uses frameworks, models and theoretical concepts from sensemaking, knowledge management and new institutional theory to integrate interrelated concepts in order to demonstrate how various factors (internal, external, social, contextual, etc..) come together to influence sensemaking of the actors involved in implementing policy. The aim is to underscore the need to take account of, and bring to the fore, implementation actors' sensemaking, which in turn will allow us to look beyond their disposition in relation to what they are supposed to do as mandated by policy prescripts. By

making use of existing implementation literature, the study analytically examines how grassroots actors construct meaning around policy; how they interpret their own actions with regard to the spirit inherent to existing policy; and how they draw inferences from changed behaviour as a consequence.

A review of the literature will reveal the important connections scholars have made between sensemaking and policy implementation (Spillane, Reiser, Reimer, 2002; Stensaker & Gronhaug, 2008), sensemaking and institutionalism (Weber & Glynn, 2006), sensemaking and knowledge management (Cecez-Kecmanovic, Jerram, Treleaven, Sykes, 2002; Choo, 2002), intuitionism and policy implementation (O'Toole Jr., 2002; Rice, 2012), knowledge management and policy implementation (Mischen & Jackson, 2008). However, the lack of integration of these ideas may be understandable, and attributable, in part, to the “scholarly division of labour”, since each of these theories has “different disciplinary homes” (Weber & Glynn, 2006, p.1640).

Policy implementation studies tend to be carried out largely by those in political science and public administration (e.g., Lester & Goggin, 1998; deLeon & deLeon, 2002). Relying on work from sociology, social psychology and cognitive science, sensemaking studies emphasise intersubjective micro-level processes (e.g., Wieck, 1995; Spillane, Reiser, Reimer, 2002; Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Knowledge management concepts are largely utilised by organisational theorists (e.g., Spender, 1996; Choo, 1996; Tsoukas, 2002). Institutional forms and actions that influence policies and programs tend to focus primarily on extra-subjective macro-level structures (Weber & Glynn, 2006). There is also micro-intuitionism that focuses on individual human action as the basic unit of analysis (e.g., Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Rise, 2012; Cardinale, 2018). The connections made may not always provide direct answers to policy implementation research questions, but they do contribute to addressing concerns that are central to policy implementation.

Policy implementation scholars have produced various theories, models and frameworks that we have used to structure our investigation. However, there are divergent (and sometimes conflicting) approaches to implementation research, often characterised by different types of research approaches; these differing methodologies and variations in models can add to a perplexing assortment of variables in the implementation process. Normative disagreements have led to a state in the field of policy implementation where there is no universal unanimity – “researchers continue to work from diverse theoretical perspectives and employ different

variables to make sense of their findings” (O'Toole, Jr., 1984, p.182). In a study linking key variables deemed important by researchers from more than 100 implementation studies, O'Toole Jr. writes, “roughly half of the published studies in the field identify policy characteristics (especially clarity, specificity, and flexibility of goals and procedures, and validity of a policy's causal theory) as significant; approximately the same number claim that resources (financial and other) are crucial” (p.189).

Categories of variables commonly acknowledged relate to implementation agencies, implementation actors, orientation of target groups, behaviours, perceptions, attitudes and the possibilities for learning by participants. Just as in other fields in the social sciences, implementation research (profoundly dominated by case studies and inductive orientation) can serve the practical or heuristic purposes of bringing to attention such challenges as thrown up by the discrepancy between policy and action, and highlight the significance of clusters of variables and their relationships. To this end, we have to develop systematic knowledge that will enable implementing agents to deal with emergent policy problems; we must investigate how the limited information thus obtained can pertinently influence the behaviour of actors in the policy process, and which will facilitate changes in their understanding and practice. Based on negligible case studies - and only those variables deemed crucial for analysis by the implementing agents - much of the empirical work in the field tends primarily to conclude with superficial discussions of recommendations, and their implications, mainly directed to participants in the policy process. The failure to attend, purposefully ignore, or selectively attend to policy initiative directions by implementing agencies and implementation agents is explained in terms of rational choice notions, in which utility maximization is the guiding principle for human behaviour. While recent research in implementation studies has challenged the aforementioned assumptions, many conventional theories of implementation still portray, implicitly or explicitly, implementing agencies and agents as deliberately interpreting, or misinterpreting, policy to align with their personal interests or agendas. According to such theories the assumption is that players, at both macro- and micro-levels, are supposedly motivated by self-interest. Hence monitoring systems, accompanied by appropriate incentives or censure, are considered essential, if principals are to ensure that policy objectives are realised.

From a sensemaking and knowledge management perspective, it cannot be presumed that decisions, as made by players in the policy process, should rest predominantly on research findings based on rational choice theories. While it is accepted that policy recommendations

compiled from empirical literature on grass roots actors are characterized by contradictions and inconsistencies, they cannot simply be dismissed as being without any utility. To explain factors influencing the implementation of policy, we need to investigate the mechanisms by which field workers make sense of policy, and then endeavour to link the ensuing understanding with implementation activities. In such a way, a sensemaking framework can provide numerous avenues of investigation into the particular ideas of relevant policymakers, and determine whether policy intentions are amenable to local practices.

Ideas from organisational sensemaking are not presented here as proxies to conventional frameworks of policy implementation. Rather, they are meant to complement implementation insights by characterising the way natural sensemaking processes can weed out the types of problems experienced in the process of policy implementation. Sensemaking enables us to unravel the tensions between the innovation of inter-subjectivity (micro-level processes) and the control, or interlocking routines, of generic subjectivity (at macro-level) by conceptualising implementing agencies as social structures. Conceptualizing the challenges of implementation in this fashion, according to Spillane et al. (2002, p. 392), enables us to engage the attention of policy implementers about how they “first notice, then frame, interpret, and construct meaning for policy messages[...] construct the meaning of a policy message and their own behaviour, and how this process leads or does not lead to a change in how they view their own practice, potentially leading to changes in both understanding and behaviour.”

This thesis, therefore, seeks to address some of the critiques levelled against the present state of implementation analysis: (a) lack of theoretical accumulation and follow-up (O’Toole, 2002); (b) restrictions imposed by the quality of advice on micro-implementation; and (c) policy suggestions that are either unconvincing or vague, or both. To this end, this study is responding to a call by O’Toole (1986, p.205) that “efforts should be undertaken to build systematically and cumulatively on the research that has focused on policy characteristics, resources, implementation structure, implementer disposition, implementer-client relationship.” Furthermore, owing to the complexity of the phenomenon, policy challenges cannot be satisfactorily encompassed only by implementation frameworks. The study of the policy process, in general, would be enhanced by more “disciplinary cross-fertilization.” The advantages of such a multidisciplinary effort are particularly notable in the analysis of micro-implementation.

Conceptual resources drawn from a sensemaking framework, institutional theory and knowledge management will be used to foreground important aspects of policy implementation. Such an approach enables a broader and deeper understanding that leads to the consolidation of policy design and implementation, so that more cogent policies and strategy systems, which facilitate ongoing review and analysis, can emerge. Furthermore, it equips us to discuss the implementation process in a manner that permits sensemaking to be a focal activity in the construction and understanding of elements of policy, its implementation, the environment, and the role of the people involved. This will allow it to go beyond the limitations which predominantly centre on quantitative measurement, utility maximisation, or instrumentality, that so often characterise analysis of policy initiatives.

1.3 Approach

Earlier research designs on implementation were empirically driven and paid scant attention to the theoretical underpinnings of policy implementation as a multi-faceted process. Nominal theoretical foundation contributed to a state of enquiry in the field where it became increasingly difficult to explain why certain cases of implementation run aground or why others yield results, thus, limiting the range of feasible functional strategies.

This thesis undertakes a narrative review of selected literature, in the process identifying texts, or the setting down of exploratory principles, with a view to lay the ground for a critical analysis of crucial elements in policy implementation. Such a narrative review approach gives us the means of collecting information from numerous sources, for it is “considered appropriate for summarising and synthesising the literature to draw conclusions about ‘what we know’ about the subject” (Nilsen, 2015, p.2). By pointing to concepts, identifying domains and defining them as an array of variables, and then relating them to phenomena, researchers are able to predict how specific relationships lead to specific events. The goal is to find models that yield qualitative results. Such an approach should lead to the requisite insights.

The implementation process provides an infrastructure that has many of the characteristics identified by Weick (1995) for being shared by the majority of those, among a diverse group of studies, related to sensemaking. Whereas Weick (1995, p.172) does not particularly write much about policy implementation, he cites policy making as one of the sites where sensemaking clearly occurs. To help us grasp sensemaking as it unfolds in policy implementation, eight of the ten characteristics suggested by Weick (1995, p.173) are

particularly germane to our purpose: a) researchers endeavour to “preserve action that is situated in context”; b) participant’s accounts are central; c) organisational actors, rather than researchers, describe the environment in which action occurs; d) instead of hypotheses, patterns are used to describe findings; e) accounts of a phenomenon are “tested as much against common sense and plausibility as against *a priori* theories”; f) enquiry is limited to a “smaller number of cases, rather than the selective examination of a larger number of cases”; and g) research methods are chosen in the “service of gaining access to the situated generation of some kind of explanation for unexpected interruptions.” While these commonalities are not to be read as prescriptive, they suggest a mind-set that tends to be associated with exploring issues of craft, as well as issues of substance to help us in tracking an essential question in sensemaking research: “how are meanings and artefacts produced and reproduced in the complex nets of collective actions?” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; in Weick, 1995, p. 172).

Material on policy implementation, the sensemaking framework, institutional theory and knowledge management as a basis for conceptual analysis, is obtained from a variety of sources, such as books, research articles, journals, newspapers, essays, and the internet. Crucial implementation variables, constructs or concepts presumed to account for implementation and the relationships between them are captured to elaborate on theories, models and frameworks. The texts that have been selected for analysis represent relevant social, cultural, political, and environmental (or of social behaviour), as well as other multidisciplinary considerations that have a bearing on salient features of micro-implementation. One limitation, though, is that different sources may have different approaches and conceptualisation of the same critical elements in the phenomenon, and another is, of difficulties in finding suitable texts and data.

Rather than proffering firm theoretical descriptions and causal relations, as quantitative models do, a qualitative approach, as used in this thesis, allows for flexible conceptual analysis of the key factors and the relationships between them. Importantly, conceptual analysis is aimed at representing behaviours and practices that are ensconced in the implementation process. The methodological assumptions in use relate to the process of building an analysis, and assessing what insights are revealed about the “real world” of policy implementation. Building an analysis framework by drawing from extant multidisciplinary sources is done through a process of theorisation to trace, identify and generate concepts central to our understanding of the implementation process.

The approach adopted in this thesis is different from one of mere descriptions, where concepts are organised into themes, and are more likely to be summaries from the literature. Theorisation emphasises interpretation, while parsimonious on, if any, descriptions. As a method of enquiry, conceptual analysis seeks to bestow us with an illuminating array of factors and conditions necessary for effective implementation. It brings out, explores and clarifies ideas about the mechanisms by which implementation actors construct meaning from, and about, the implementation as a function of the interface of (a) their beliefs, experience and knowledge; (b) policy content; and (c) the situation in which they attempt to make sense of policy.

The goal of using conceptual analysis to examine policy implementation is mainly to enact a favourable set of circumstances that are (a) commensurate and consequential for its application and (b) allow for a fair rendering of its content. The approach may sometimes produce only a tentative account, or fractional understanding, of the implementation process, but it should still be of much value notwithstanding. One might discern either essential conditions for an effective implementation of policy or just some adequate working conditions. The first-mentioned may assist us to identify certain apparent cases in which implementation is likely to be either successful or fail; and the second help us to formulate an assessment that enables us to make a helpful judgement.

1.4 Thesis Outline

Chapter 2 reviews the policy implementation literature to explore how implementation is conceptualised and understood. The literature was mined for evidence of theoretical concepts in implementation. Informed by the exploration of research literature, two implementation models have been chosen to act as a ‘research frame’ and guide ensuing discussion. First, Najam’s (1995) ‘5Cs’ protocol is used to identify and elaborate on the critical variables of policy implementation. Second, Matland’s (1995) model is used to describe the conditions under which different types of policies are likely to succeed or fail, depending on the degree of the policy’s ambiguity and coherence. Theoretical understanding developed at this stage serves as a pre-understanding to use sensemaking framework to make transparent the complexity endemic to the policy process, and to understand implementation as a dynamic process of negotiation between multiple actors operating at different levels, within and between multiple organisations.

Weick (1995) suggests that, instead of paying attention to predefined outcomes, we can use sensemaking to unravel and comprehend how social processes influence organisational outcomes. Chapter 3 outlines several agreed upon tenets of organisational sensemaking as a framework to be used to explore the social aspects of policy implementation, and to describe how implementing agencies and implementation agents make sense of policy and their environment. Inspired by Weick's articulation of different levels of sensemaking, a sensemaking model of knowledge examines the link between knowledge types at various levels of organisational sensemaking - individual knowledge, organisational knowledge and cultural knowledge - and tensions between these levels. Lastly, the chapter concludes by exploring perspectives that elaborate on the processes and mechanisms by which institutional context is linked to actions, and thus implicated in sensemaking.

Chapter 4 integrates the analysis of sensemaking dimensions of critical variables of implementation and their interaction. The conceptual analysis seeks to link variables and their interaction to actions and events beyond their immediate scope, thereby embedding them in the implementing agency's social dynamics and bringing to light the value of sensemaking. Sensemaking concepts are employed to underscore the framing of meanings at macro-, meso- and micro levels. Examining and contrasting the linkages of meaning framing at different levels is crucial to understanding how the policy intentions are presented, and likely to be understood at different levels. While the framing of meanings are not necessarily located at any particular organisation level, the emergent meanings and the direction of how policy evolves appears more strongly to be influenced by interactions at the micro-level. The chapter, then, explores in depth two key, though seldom explored, social dimensions of the implementation praxis: the mechanism by which implementation actors make sense of policy, and how multiple dimensions of a situation, or context, can influence emergent behaviour.

Chapter 5 considers the implications of multidisciplinary frameworks, especially sensemaking, to the policy implementation. The chapter discusses the implications of policy design and implementation for the public sector, implementation in general and implementation research. By building new understanding, beyond the top-down and bottom-up debate, sensemaking analysis of crucial variables of implementation and their interface serve to advance the extent to which social knowledge, or conceptual generalisations about micro-implementation, can be modified and refined.

Chapter 2

Implementation

2.1 Introduction

In a review of policy implementation as a field of study in a paper titled *Evolution of the Field and Agenda for Future Research*, Lester, Bowman, Goggin and O'Toole Jr. (1987) acknowledge that there is widespread agreement about modest progress in the field, in spite of vexing difficulties forestalling the development of acquiring further valid knowledge. According to these authors, divergent empirical and theoretical orientations as impediments to the further development of implementation research can be traced to three different, but unrelated weaknesses: “(1) theoretical pluralism, (2) restricted context, and (3) a lack of cumulation” (Lester, Bowman, Goggin & O'Toole Jr., 1987, p.200).

In examining proposals for alleviating implementation non-performance, O'Toole (1986) found that the literature makes recommendations that are at variance. Sixteen years later, O'Toole (2002, p.267) conceded that an implementation “consensus is not close at hand, and there had been relatively little emphasis on parsimonious explanation.” Notwithstanding, some influential authors in the field (e.g., Ingram, 1990; Najam, 1995; Matland, 1995; Lester & Goggin, 1998; Schneider, 1999; deLeon & deLeon, 2001; O'Toole, 2002) surprisingly share similar views on the value of previous works, and reach consistently similar conclusions about what has been achieved. Without following any strict chronology, there are certain consistent identifiable landmarks in the evolution of implementation scholarship.

The first generation of implementation studies (e.g., Derthick, 1972; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Bardach, 1977) focused on identifying and describing several impediments to effective policy implementation. This earlier pioneering work, which usually consisted of cases study analyses, was bereft of any attempt to develop a useful theory. It lacked any kind of dynamic model of the implementation process that could provide explanations for the implementation failures, or offer suggestions about how to overcome hurdles. Explicitly, Goggin (1986, p.329) opines on these seminal efforts thus: “initial studies of implementation were, for the most part, detailed accounts of how a single authoritative decision was carried out, either at a single location or at multiple sites” The assumption was that successful implementation would occur automatically once applicable policies were proclaimed by an authoritative body; hence attention was rather concentrated on hindrances to effective implementation.

Building on this earlier research, which had bequeathed a body of knowledge describing the relationships between policy and practice in specific cases, the second generation of implementation scholarship (e.g., Nakamura & Smallwood, 1980; Berman, 1980; Lipsky, 1980; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; Hjern & Hull, 1983) set out to contest some of the forerunners earlier presumptions. In an effort to produce a useful theory of policy implementation, they sought to develop models and analytical frameworks that would contribute to understanding and explaining factors that influenced outcomes of policy objectives. However, normative disagreements over the development of empirical theory and research approach soon gave rise to a clash and ensuing struggle between proponents of the two main contending perspectives. Their differing theoretical approaches and the various factors they employed to make sense of the implementation process will be elaborated upon in subsequent sections.

Most importantly though, a broad consensus came into existence that yielded the following insights: (a) the development of a general exposition of success and failure of policy implementation; (b) it was demonstrated that cross-sectional or longitudinal studies have a bearing on implementation research findings, and (c) a more optimistic view of implementation outcomes was provided. This was in contrast to the earlier studies' pessimistic conclusion that "governmentally-sponsored programs seldom achieve their objective" (Pressman & Wildvsky, 1973; Murphy, 1973; Bardach, 1977; in Lester et al., 1987, p.201). In general, broad categories of both the first and second generation literature resulted in adding new knowledge dimensions to implementation scholarship: (a) improved understanding of the nature of implementation, its variations across time and space (settings and implementing agencies) and policies; and (b) the linking of policy formulation with practice and analysis generated a number of crucial lessons for the policy process (O'Toole, 1986).

Malcom Goggin and his colleagues (1990) proposed a third generation of implementation studies, which by contrast, was less troubled by specific instances of implementation failures. Rather, they were more attentive to demystifying how the implementation process unravels itself overall, and how its prospects might be enhanced. Consequently, research strategies sought to engender theoretical utility by accumulating and comparing knowledge from discrete policy studies, with the objective of illuminating a symbiotic relationship between practice and theory. The task of building an all-encompassing "implementation theory", however, proved ambitious from the beginning; especially in the light of major findings from

emergent research, that implementation is a complex political, administrative and social phenomenon with too many variables (Lester et al., 1987; Goggin et al., 1990; O'Toole, 2002). Having said that, a lack of aggregation and convergence of knowledge persists to this day in the field. Najam (1995, p.12) articulates the status quo thus: “predictive implementation theory remains elusive... [the third] generation of scholarship has substantially enhanced our understanding of the important clusters of variables that can impact implementation”.

Implementation scholarship has seen mounting efforts to move past the rather animated empirical arguments between those identified as advocates of the two main contending streams (top-down and bottom-up outlooks). Many scholars agree that ample evidence has been gathered to partly corroborate both camps' arguments (Mazmanian & Sabatier 1989, Goggin et al., 1990; Matland 1995; Najam, 1995; O'Toole, 2002; Sinclair, 2006). Helpful propositions for synthetic or contingent frameworks offered acknowledge generally that variables located at macro- and meso-level are consequential at micro-level. For our purpose, a noteworthy contribution of this development in implementation research is that it seeks to integrate the macro domain of policy formulation with the micro dynamics of individual grassroots players. Accepting and incorporating diversity and the inherent complexity of the implementation process, this chapter looks broadly at clusters of ‘critical variables’ that have been commonly identified and are used to explicate cases of implementation in a myriad of policy issues. It spotlights conditions under which some of the variables from the two main sparring perspectives are likely to affect implementation and its desired outcomes.

2.2 Defining Implementation

The literal meaning of implementation refers to embarking upon, fulfilling, producing or bringing to fruition a given task (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973, in Najam, 1995, p.7). A view of implementation adopted in this thesis is that policy implementation takes varying forms and shapes in diverse cultures and institutional settings. The process also involves diverse operational players at various levels, between and within wide-ranging organisations. According to Sinclair (2006, p.78), as an “applied and interdisciplinary social science” and not just as some form of social science activities, “ideally, implementation research must address important theoretical questions which, when answered, will explain and predict what happens when a new policy is initiated.” For implementation research to realise theoretical utility, Sinclair (2006, p.78) stresses the significance of understanding the connection

between theory and practice as a goal aimed at reducing “the complexity of the empirical world on the basis of explanations and predictions.”

A common critique of policy implementation studies is the lack of substantial theoretical and explanatory parsimony; evinced by a plurality of research strategies, diverse perspectives, and theoretical findings, but barely substantive convergence and accretion in our knowledge of implementation (O’Toole, 2002, p.202). The literature on implementation has been lamented by its protagonist as “long on description and short on prescription”, and riddled with “proverbs” (Elmore, 1979, p.60). The profusion of definitions, the nuances of scale, stress, and scope by leading scholars on the subject are even more pronounced in other aspects of research such as causal or predictive theory-building. These problems arise from the difficulty in ascertaining whether theorists and researchers are analysing the same issue or dealing with a different phenomena. The rigour of the discipline requires us to be explicit in defining the assumptions that underlie the choice of factors that constitute units of analysis, and to be meticulous in drawing out the relations between constructs central to the implementation process in order to accomplish the theory’s utility.

Those implementation scholars who agree on the need to winnow systematically the multiplicity of potential explanatory variables towards establishing parsimonious explanations have converged on crucial theoretical constructs (Lester et al., 1987, Goggin et al., 1990, Matland, 1995; Najam, 1995; O’Toole, 2002; Winter, 2002; Sinclair, 2006). Models proposed by these theorists embrace, as a point of departure, a definition of implementation as a process in which decisions or actions are geared toward putting policies into effect. This view resounds with the seminal work of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) and is ordinarily associated with top-down perspectives (in Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975, p.447-8). However, the assumption by the above mentioned theorists does not necessarily imply that macro-level variables are more important than micro-level elements; this is a subject for empirical theoretical research. What the models of these aforesaid theorists seek to capture is that policy formulation instigates policy actions that trigger implementation processes into motion.

The areas where implementation frameworks differ are over aspects of policy formulation that are critical for explaining implementation. There are differing assumptions of how to construct the array of variables necessary for incorporation into a policy formulation, even among researchers who support a synthesis in theory. To explain implementation, researchers tend to choose between two broad sets of variables: (a) clarity and mandate of policy content,

or that is to say, the means selected to realise policy objectives (e.g. program design, policy tools such as resources, authority, incentives or sanctions, various means by which policy is communicated to implementers, etc.); and (b) political context, social context, and relevant actors (e.g. causal theory, conflict, symbolism, target group, stakeholders) - and how the relationships among these shape the content of policy and backing for it.

In addition to the foregoing differences, another vexing challenge bedevilling implementation research is the varied conceptions for implementation outcomes. According to Sinclair (2006, p.79), “research on implementation that does not include measures of outcomes, or at least outputs, is incomplete.” Owing to the complexity of implementation environments, the assertion that “even the firmest mandates of governments may be diluted, reinterpreted, redirected, and transformed until policy outcomes bear little resemblance to original policy goals” is generally accepted. As a result among theorists there are diverse views on how an implementation outcome should be measured. Some argue that programs evolve over the passage of time, and as a result implementation outcomes are not dichotomous, and therefore cannot be evaluated in terms of failure or success (Goggin et al., 1990). Winter (200) has outlined in detail the challenges inherent in deploying specific policy objectives to gauge the success or otherwise of implementation initiatives.

Implementation research efforts which have developed theories, models, or frameworks that endeavour to synthesise top-down and bottom-up perspectives are most relevant for our purposes in this chapter. Research in this area builds on the lessons of two earlier generations of scholarship, and seeks to synthesise commonalities within it by suggesting a set of explanatory variables that would be the most appropriate to explain implementation under fitting conditions.

The next three subsections of this section will briefly summarise representative key influential models and contributions from (1) top-down and (2) bottom-up varieties, as well as (3) review a number of attempts to synthesise the two outlooks into a more extensive framework. This divide between the two streams is cited as the single most important fault line in the field. Competing conceptual frameworks reflect the lack of an “agreed-upon theory that adequately explains why those who implement public policies behave as they do” (Goggin et al., 1990). However, subsequent findings and debates have led to the identification of critical variables, the result of which has been invaluable for policy implementation and analysis.

2.2.1 Top-down Stream

The top-down theorists emphasise the role of those policymakers who are expected to command direct control over field-workers and the implementation environment. The onus for successful implementation is placed firmly in the hands of policy formulators. Mazmanian and Sabatier's (1983) observations, conceivably lauded as the foremost articulation of the top-down perspective, commence with the following three remarks: (a) policy design involves three iterative and distinct process of formulating, implementing and reformulating policy, and the separation should be upheld; (b) whereas, although implementation outputs and outcomes are both acknowledged as significant, the primary purpose of implementation should be to achieve clearly specified policy goals, and (c) implementation can be seen from three distinct standpoints: the central top, implementing agencies and agents, target communities at whom programs are directed.

According to the top-downers, successful implementation may actually only be achieved after setting in motion certain mechanisms. The rationale for this idea is that implementation commences at the top and unfolds through successive and mounting precise steps which delineate in detail what is expected of implementers at each stage (Elmore, 1979). What the appropriate outcome should be is assessed with respect to the original unambiguous statement of policy intention. The concerns of top-down proponents with regard to actions of implementing agents and target groups is to examine the extent to which their decision and actions are in accord with the goals embodied in authoritative decisions (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983).

Scant attention is paid to the role of grassroots actors, and it is restricted only to actors formally recognised by the centre, and who are involved in specific programs. Interest is primarily directed towards bureaucratic structures and administrative controls, such as regulation, budgeting, planning, communication, evaluation and funding formulas. Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) attribute implementation failure to the three scenarios proposed by Kaufman (1973, p.3): "subordinates don't know what their superiors want, they can't do what their superiors want, or they refuse to do what their superiors want." According to this view, the main causes of non-implementation are attributable to problems related to communication, capacity, and implementer disposition.

The foregoing assumptions were questioned by a growing body of scholarship that highlighted the importance of micro-implementation, which had either been unheeded or

presumed inconsequential before. A top-down perspective faces the following criticism. First, it takes the statutory language as a baseline, thereby failing to pay attention to conditions and behaviours that give rise to problems that policy seeks to address. Since implementation is a complex process that involves several players at different levels, it cannot be assumed that all priorities can *a priori* be known, and accordingly ranked. Second, conceiving implementation merely as an administrative process ignores its political character (Berman, 1978; Matland, 1995; Najam, 1995). This implies failure to recognise inherent political realities in relation to policies that have multiple goals, equivocal or vague language, and multifaceted implementation structures.

Third, exclusive concentration on policy designers as central players undermines the argument from a normative perspective, that grassroots players lay claim to first-hand factual knowledge of drawbacks at local level; and therefore, they are ahead of the pack when it comes to advancing solutions. It also neglects the reality of policy adaptation, or distortions, at a micro-implementation level. Last, local actors are viewed and treated as obstructions to successful implementation. The argument amounts to, field workers' "shirking behaviour" or "disposition" must be curtailed.

2.2.2 Bottom-Up Stream

Focusing on individuals and their behaviour, proponents of the bottom-up approach take problems in the community as a starting point. Scholars in this stream challenge the hierarchical assumption of top-down models. Attention shifts to 'actual practice', and thereby field workers. Articulated variously, the main argument is that "the ordering principle of implementation research is not a policy problem as defined and addressed by the formal political system, but rather as defined and addressed by the relevant societal actors – who, of course, include those of the formal political system" (Hjern & Hull, 1982; in Najam, 1995, p.21). The contributions of bottom-up theorists like Berman (1978), Elmore (1979) and Lipsky (1980) emphasise the central role of what they respectively called "deliverers", or "front-line workers", or "street-level bureaucrats", as key drivers of implementation.

Berman's (1978) analysis of the differences between macro- and micro-implementation starts with the recognition that effective implementation is contingent upon the complex interplay between policy and its contextual settings. The analysis posits that the difference between macro- and micro-implementation processes is a function of distinct variations in institutional settings for multiple actors at different levels. Macro-level implementation occurs when

centrally located top officials translate policy into a program or project plan, and seek to influence implementing agencies to execute the plan. However, actors at micro-implementation level wield determinative power that exerts influence on policy outcomes. According to Berman, field workers “devise and carry out their own internal policies” (Najam, 1995, p.19) based on their reading of local settings. As a result, the rules crafted by players at the top are subordinate to local contextual factors. Officials at the top can only indirectly influence micro-level dynamics.

Reporting on his own empirical research, Berman (1978) argues that if project plans are not amenable for reconsideration to fit local circumstances, and routinised behaviour of service deliverers is not sufficiently pliable to accommodate adjustment, a project will not be implemented at all. Elmore’s (1979, p.605) contribution is a “backward mapping” approach in that he contends: “the closer one is to the source of the problem, the greater is one’s ability to influence it; and the problem-ability of complex systems depends not on hierarchical control but on maximising discretion at the points where the problem is most immediate.” According to Elmore (1975, p.604), policy intention as articulated by the policy designer is not the first act of implementation; instead, it is “specific behaviour at the lowest level of the implementation process that generate the need for policy.” This is achieved by giving a description of behaviours that at the onset instigate the need for policy. It involves spelling out a series of procedures required for ascertaining the desired adaptation at each stage, and restating the steps upwards until the central level is arrived at. It is only after that, when behaviour is described and specific targets at the lowest level are established that policy objectives are then stated as a set of outcomes, or effects germinating from the bottom.

Michael Lipsky (1980) posits a “street-level bureaucracy theory” in which micro-implementers are paramount. He argues that each actor at grassroots level commands a great deal of discretion in relation to decisions made in his/her interaction with target communities when delivering public services. According to Lipsky, service deliverers interact with service beneficiaries on a daily basis, and have at least some contact with government agencies at regular intervals. In the course of this direct interaction, street-level bureaucrats use special “coping mechanisms” to handle discrepancies between the many demands made on public services and the limited resources at their disposal. Coping mechanisms include: holding back information to deter demands for services; complicating access to services; instituting a mixture of psychological deterrence, etc. (Lipsky, 1980).

Lipsky and his colleagues focus mainly on similarities to explain the behaviours of grassroots actors and not on causal mechanisms behind coping predilections. Since divergence is a requirement for explaining, instead of focusing on behaviour congruencies of individuals across service delivery policies, subsequent chapters will elaborate on variations in behaviours of implementing agencies and implementing agents. The possibility for a productive exchange of information and learning always exists at local level, but often, it is largely unrealised. When a dissatisfactory interaction between an implementing agent and a client prompts one of them to not only deduce that “there has to be a better way”, but genuinely propose a resolution to a challenge, occasionally, that suggestion goes off-course owing to the lack of mechanisms for capturing it.

Since implementation brings together policy designers, implementing agencies, the target community and external stakeholders, the focus and locus of the phenomenon should, therefore, be located where deliberative interaction, as regards required actions, transpires and is actualised. This thesis will argue that the inherent cognitive-emotional dimensions of street-level bureaucrats, in interplay with the institutional context (e.g. resources, rules, time, etc.), are a key determinant of whether grassroots actors will innovatively transform, support or subvert prescribed policy objectives.

While the enforcement of regulations and the role and degree of discretion accorded make micro-level actors crucial players in the process of implementation, there is concern about how discretion can be used as a device to bolster implementation effectiveness at the local level. Ingram and Schneider (1990, p.80) caution that “grassroots approaches may be most effective in areas that already have strong policy but leave less developed areas worse off than before.” This implies that in cases where implementers are afforded greater levels of discretion or regulations are enforced, underprivileged clients from poor social backgrounds and insufficient educational opportunities are often potentially disadvantaged from benefitting from public services in comparison with better educated and wealthier groups. This situation even prevails in cases where marginalized communities are the primary targets of social services.

The overriding appraisal of a bottom-up outlook is its denunciation of the authority of policy makers in respect of standard democratic theory. In a democratic dispensation, such as in South Africa, the authority of grassroots actors is not derived from sovereign voters. Matland (1995, p.150) argues that it not unreasonable to expect that policy control in a democratic society ought to be discharged by “actors whose power derives from accountability to voters

through elected representatives.” While not necessarily disagreeing with Matland, deLeon and deLeon (2002) counter that encouraging more participation by clients and advocacy coalitions in the implementation of programs is fundamentally better than less, because it imbues “strategies into implementation that enhance participation strengthened democracy” (in Mischen & Sinclair, 2007, p.146).

2.2.3 Towards a Synthesis

Earlier analytical models of implementation research were earmarked by case studies (Kaufman, 1960; Murphy, 1971; Wildavsky, 1973; in Berman, 1978, p.158), and decidedly pessimistic in terms of predictions, which rehashed the proverbial conclusion: “the best laid plans of social reform invariably go astray.” Second generation studies, top-down and bottom-up streams, were concerned with throwing light on implementation success or failure. The assumption of direct and determinant hierarchical control over implementation, use of legal instruments to constrain behaviour, an undermining of the role of field workers remained a top-down standpoint.

In reaction to this more antecedent dominant genre, the bottom-down approach identified weaknesses in this view, and began recommending alternatives to the conceptual flaws it found there. Analyses concentrate on “those who are charged with carrying out policy rather than those who formulate and convey it” (Lipsky, 1978, p.398). Deference to instructions and orders transmitted from the top to actors at the lower echelon of implementation did not follow automatically. Some of the bottom-up theorists were so bold as to submit that “discretion at lower level is not only inevitable, but also desirable.... [because] it is necessary for policies to be ‘reinvented’ so that they fit local needs” (Palumbo & Hander, 1981, in Najam, 1995, p.13).

The debate between the two contending approaches shows that each side tends to lean towards those particular aspects of the implementation reality that is overlooked by the other. Notwithstanding differences between the two perspectives, important lessons can be drawn from empirical studies brought out by researchers from both camps. Several more sophisticated analytic models and a wide-ranging list of potentially helpful variables were increasingly produced. The schisms, in most cases, are not about which clusters of variables are used, as it is about the comparative prominence of distinctive variables within particular implementation scenarios. To illustrate, the apple of discord is not about whether

implementation implicates multiple-actors in several organizational processes, but on which organizational players they have the most direct bearing.

Hanf 's (1982) statement that "it is not a question of choosing 'top' or 'bottom' as though these were mutually exclusive alternatives", exemplifies arguments for convergence (in Najam, p.995, p.14). There has been growing an emerging consensus among theorists across the divide on the necessity for synthesis between the two main perspectives, and craft models that encapsulate the strong points from both. Attempts at a synthesis recognise that in the majority of implementation cases, macro- and micro-level exigencies can simultaneously frame partiality. In some instances, particular features are more salient, making one approach predominantly more appropriate than another in explaining the implementation process. According to Wittrock & deLeon (1986), combining both approaches implies that policy analysis must take into consideration legislated policy tools, resources and the "changing contextuality in which problems exist" (in Najam, 1995, p.23).

An analysis of implementation which builds on existing literature generally takes two approaches into account to develop a synthesis theory: (1) an integrative merging of the two streams within the same model (Elmore 1982, 1985; Goggin, 1986, 1990; O'Toole, 1986, 2000; Sabatier, 1991; Najam, 1995); and (2) concentrating on conditions under which salient features from one approach are more suitable to explaining implementation than others (Thomas & Grindle, 1990; Matland, 1995). To build a foundation upon which to employ insights from an organisational sensemaking framework, to examine implementation as a complex and multileveled political process, which involves an appreciable number of diverse actors, the remainder of this chapter will elaborate on two models from each of these two groups.

First, Najam's (1995) '5Cs Protocol' model simultaneously combines variable clusters considered by top-down and bottom-up proponents as crucial and canvases the theoretical relationships between them. Second, Matland (1995) proposes an ambiguity-conflict model that identifies characteristics of implementation scenarios in which top-down and bottom-up streams tend to be pragmatic, and for which conditions and determining variables from either perspective are for the most part appropriate. Leading up to that discussion; the next section shifts through descriptions of implementation in its manifest complexity by spelling out the assumptions that will underpin further analysis.

2.3 Understanding implementation in its complexity

Many scholars are increasingly of the opinion that to achieve further advances in policy implementation, future research must specify pursuits that are clearly implementable, so that we can state with certainty the extent to which implementation has occurred or not (Lester et al., 1987; Winter, 2002). Researchers are in agreement the most abiding feature of implementation is that it is conceived of as a process, with output, and sometimes also as an outcome. It can either be conceptualised as a process that incorporates all the activities that occur while pursuing a policy goal (implementation as a verb), or as a state in which goals have been accomplished (implementation as a noun). Thus, even when goals have not been realised (noun), it does not necessarily imply that the process (verb) has not occurred.

Applying the foregoing logic to South Africa's post-apartheid policy of reconstruction and development programs (RDP), we can consider the policy's explicit objectives to deliver houses and services to target communities. After more than 25 years since the policy's promulgation, the need for houses and service in those communities remains; and therefore, one can conclude that implementation (noun) has not happened. The conclusion may be arrived at owing to the following: (a) particular steps to realise the goals as prescribed in the policy were never followed; (b) policy prescripts and steps were followed but failed to yield desired outcomes; (c) policy and steps were transformed; or (d) most probably, a combination of all the above. The reality is that the process of implementation did occur even though policy prescripts were ignored, taken or transformed. While implementation as a verb and implementation as a noun are intricately related, to bring about implementation (noun) and to get the measure of its success or failure (outcome), we must foremost appreciate and comprehend the unfolding operations of implementation (verb) so that we might sway it (Najam, 1995, p.32). The focus of this research is implementation as a verb; that is to say, what happens once policy is enacted.

To distinguish the characteristics of the implementation 'product' from the 'process' of what happens during implementation, Goggin (1986, pp.330-331) underscores the analytical chasm between the outcome of implementation and its operational dimension. He cites Musto (1975) and Epstein (1974) to argue that "implementation performance should be divorced from its consequences, programmatic performance." According to this view, a range of options, or alternatives chosen by field workers and their actions, denotes the preliminary stages of implementation. This implies that the process of implementation has a "beginning, middle and an end", with each phase characterised by its own "goals, strategies and agents"

(Goggin, 1986, p.342). Perhaps more revealing is O'Toole's (1986) review of 100 implementation studies in which he discovers that there is normative disagreement on what turns out to be the subject of investigation, and divergent notions on what "implementation success" entails. Hence, advice is proffered against the measurement of extant research in terms of success-failure dichotomy.

O'Toole (1986) also established that the standard dependent variable in implementation research up to then has been the extent to which goals are realised; whether defined with reference to an outcome or output. According to Winter (2003), goal-achievement is a function of outcome as regards the impact on a target community, and output in relation to the degree to which implementing agents perform tasks. However, the problem is that this formulation renders theory building problematic. As will be shown later, variability in goals is ostensibly accounted for in the process of formulating policy, whereas the implementation process is given substance by performance disproportions, and other determinants, which might likely explain variations in outcomes. Taking into account the foregoing consideration, efforts to build an overriding theory of implementation have become quite complex. Problems highlighted in the literature pertaining to selecting goal-achievement as a dependent variable include: (a) goals are likely be altered during implementation, thus invalidating generalisation about goal-achievement in terms of how grassroots actors execute tasks; and (b) goals can be difficult to operationalise because policy goals are often vague and ambiguous, and vary considerably from the official to latent goals (Winter, 2003).

According to Goggin (1986), policy formulation and implementation are crucial driving forces of policy outputs, as outcomes are the aftereffects. Outputs reflect the effectiveness of the implementation at its most operational level. The usefulness of outputs, however, does not suggest that outcomes are inconsequential. At a level of abstraction, the outcome of implementation suggests that there has been a quantifiable transformation in the broader problem that gave rise to the policy. Necessarily, a pragmatic analysis of a case of implementation must investigate outputs with relevance to outcomes. Based on the aforementioned intractability of goal-achievement as a dependent variable, this thesis employs a sensemaking framework to investigate the extent to which the behaviour of grassroots actors affects performance, and, consequently, the correlation between outcomes and outputs. It is an approach that aligns with arguments by scholars who argue that the behaviour of implementing agencies and implementing agents determines, in large part, the degree to which projects flounder or flourish (Winter 2003).

A related and important view of implementation is that it is a dynamic process. This means it does not have distinct limits confining the rendering of policy intention into programs; rather, it is a “living process” that may potential reconstruct the policy itself. What Berman (1978) describes as ‘adaptation’, Majone and Wildavsky (1978) term ‘evolution’, and Goggin (1986) calls ‘adjusted implementation’, can, in some cases, give new energy to the legitimacy of a particular policy or, in contrast, serve to undermine policy intentions or goals. Theorists from the two main perspectives acknowledge that the policy process is iterative and passes through phases of formulation, implementation and reformulation, albeit with varying emphasis at different levels of analysis. In pure top-down terms, reformulation would happen at the ‘top’ in response to evaluation, while in pure bottom-up terms it would happen at the ‘bottom’ in the process of putting policy to practice. According to Sabatier (1986) and Goggin (1986), both of these different levels of analysis are important.

Implementation is not only a multi-actor phenomenon; its functions are located at several levels. To illustrate, a policy originating from national government to provide housing to marginalised communities may assign various responsibilities to multi-layered spheres of government. Implementation of this policy may require multiple levels of government to act simultaneously or concurrently. However, the dissemination of policy between levels is neither always streamlined nor one-directional. In many cases there could even be an extra number of layers implicated when we consider intra-organisational strata. It follows, therefore, that in analysing cases of implementation it is important to examine patterns of interrelations, social interactions or transactions among actors, through which information is translated, conveyed, collaboration nurtured, and conflict mediated.

Scharpf (1978, p.347) most delicately backs a view of implementation as a discrete whole made up of individual agents: “it is unlikely that public policy of any significance could result from the choice process of any single unified actor. Policy formation and policy implementation are inevitably the result of interactions among the plurality of separate actors with separate interests, goals, and strategies.” Although an approach that is traditionally linked to bottom-up theorists, it is increasingly being accepted by top-downers that implementation involves heterogeneous group of actors who act within a given terrain of manifest limiting factors.

The arguments presented in this section attests to considerable confusion about the difficulty of specifying what actually entails a measure of “successful implementation.” According to Ingram and Schneider (1990), a number of debatable conceptions of “successful

implementation” point to: compliance with the legally mandated directives of the statute; discretion of and activities by implementers which lead to them meeting specific indicators for desired outcomes; whether intended or unintended, the effects of the policy were anticipated in policy formulation; whether goals of the statutes are accomplished; mutual adaptation; improved political ambience around the programs arising from the resolution of policy conflict; and the accomplishment of grass roots goals.

Some of these measurements of implementation outcomes are mutually exclusive. As an example, agency deference to the directive of the statute could be at odds with the realisation of grassroots goals. To settle on which measures are well suited for a particular case of implementation, the decisions hinge on whether the policy designers’ values are bequeathed with normative value that supersedes other actors, especially grassroots actors. Measures of success that implicate implementing agents (bottom-up) will be rather unfitting, if policymakers desire to retain the status of having superior value. Notwithstanding, this study will argue in the next chapters that grass roots actors exercise crucial influence with regard to implementation of activities, outputs and outcomes. Furthermore, the nature of successful outcomes by which policy implementation is appraised needs to decisively address contextual factors.

The idea of policy as a ‘moving target’ presents another level of complexity to our understanding of implementation. Articulated differently; “the dynamics inherent in the implementation process can no longer be neglected, however inconvenient that must be” (Wittrock & deLeon, 1986; in Najam, 1995, p.34). Foremost to this thesis’ interest is that implementation is an adaptable process that is not merely an administration or managerial problem, but a political process. This means implementation is seized with the questions of “who gets what, how, when, where, and from whom.” The implication, then, is there is a multiplicity of actors in policy implementation, working at different levels. Plausibly, there might well be challenges in implementation sans multiple actors. However, these are, in most instances, exceptions. In essence, to unravel inherent complexity in implementation, the question is not who is best placed (top or bottom) to ‘control’ the process, but how multiple actors influence each other to shape it.

2.4 The ‘5Cs’ Protocol: Critical Variables for Implementation

To follow the phenomenon of implementation as a multi-layered political process, set against a purely administrative one, requires tracing policy as it attempts to transform its environment

and the manner in which it is transformed in the process. Substantially, we need to understand how the process can be positively influenced, so that the objectives, as set forth and equally understood at all levels, can be realised. While the course through which policy traverses as it is implemented might not be the same for each case, accumulated implementation scholarship, especially synthesis theories, suggests that there are identifiable crucial variables that define the direction and shape the form implementation may possibly take. Najam (1995, p.30) aptly underscores this point thus: “once complexity is accepted and incorporated, broad, general clusters of critical variables can, and should, be identified which may explain implementation successes or failures in a wide variety of policy issues....”

Responding to the challenge to synthesise dominant streams of implementation research by prominent scholars (Elmore, 1978; O’Toole, 1986; Lester et al., 1987; Goggin et al., 1990), Najam (1995) proposes the ‘5Cs Protocol’ model. The model uses “multiple conceptual lenses”, instead of preference for a particular lens, to identify five clusters of variables from the survey of the literature. The variables emerge as significant causal factors from different types of policies (e.g. distributive, regulatory, etc.), dealing with a variety of implementation problems in a variety of service delivery terrains (e.g. in education, welfare, environment, etc.), in varied political systems (e.g. federal, unitary, etc.), and at different levels of social and economic development (developed, developing or under-developed). Figure 1 illustrates how each one of the five variables is linked to, and possibly influenced by, others – albeit to varying degrees.

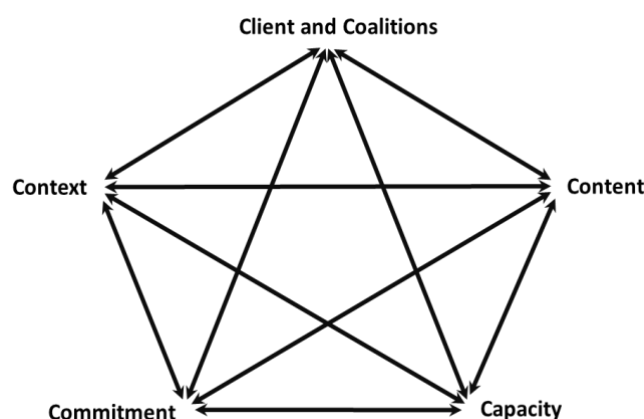


Figure 1: Najam (1995) The 5C Protocol

Connecting and analysing the variables relative to each other can help reveal the source of “implementation gaps” and provide explanations for potential implementation success and

failure. As an example, all the other four variables are likely to influence, and be influenced by, implementation capacity: (a) mechanisms for mobilisation and the deployment of resources to build capacity may, or may not, be provided for in policy content; (b) capacity building efforts may be enhanced or hampered by the dynamics of institutional context in which implementing agencies function; (c) the commitment of implementing agents to policy content (goals, causal theory and method) may be dampened by capacity deficiencies, or may compensate for resource scarcity; or (d) opposition to policy implementation by coalition of players may undermine adequately available capacity, or such capacity may be greatly amplified by supportive client and coalitions.

Najam, (1995, p.36) opines that framing an analysis of these set of descriptive variables requires us to “catalogue the strengths and influence of each variable on specific implementation efforts as well as to identify critical linkages among them on the basis of their strength and weaknesses and, most importantly, their potential to enhance the effectiveness of the particular implementation process.” The value of analysis, in this instance, lies not only in the descriptive exercise, but shifting to a potentially prescriptive approach by plotting the linkages between the variables. The next sections elaborate on the specifics of each cluster of variables, their relationships and how they shape policy as it meanders through the labyrinth of implementation.

2.4.1 Content

Theodore Lowi (1969) provides a formative topology of policy content by characterizing policy as either distributive/remunerative, redistributive/normative, or regulatory/coercive. Subsequently found useful by a variety of scholars, according to this classification, distributive policies are aimed at creating common good for the overall wellbeing of society; redistributive policies represent efforts to alter asymmetric allocation of economic privilege or the province of power between communities; and regulatory policies stipulate rules of conduct which also include corresponding penalty for noncompliance. The content of policy not only determines and articulates what policy sets out to do (goals) but is essential in how specific means are chosen to achieve those goals (causal theory) as well as how to deploy them (method). These three elements of policy content highlight its criticality in implementation and is demonstrated in Pressman and Wildavsky’s (1984, p.xv) exposition of the process as “a seamless web... a process of interaction between setting goals and actions geared to achieving them.”

If we consider, as an example, the South African policy on land redress for human settlement to alleviate housing demand backlogs. National, provincial and local government agencies might pursue the same general goal of providing affordable housing but adopt a variety of causal theories which problematize the issue in widely (and often diametrically) different ways. These range from the belief that vast tracts of land in private ownership were unfairly and forcibly acquired and should be “expropriated without compensation” to a view that policy to redress centuries of land dispossession should not disturb current patterns of land ownership in order to wrestle inequality and poverty in both rural and urban areas. Policy content in this instance is vividly affected by these obvious differences. A distributive solution might promote the idea of market related compensation; a redistributive approach might encourage expropriation without compensation; while a regulatory option might impose onerous tax penalties on private land ownership.

Expanding on the above example and assuming causal theory and design choices, regulatory policy would require stringent monitoring and concomitant enforcement. In case of a redistributive policy (incentive-based), a combination of decentralised implementation, strong potential opposition by private landowners and other coalitions, and the risk of potential corruption related to land redistribution may lead to goal deflection. A distributive policy, however, might require a different kind and level of implementation capacity and context, e.g. monetary, logistics, technical, size and skill of agency staff, requisite knowledge, etc. (as opposed to enforcement) - which necessitates administrative and operational capabilities to ensure implementation effectiveness. Levels of implementer commitment and roles of clients and coalitions might also vary across different policy types depending on how their interests are aligned with policy content.

Najam’s model looks beyond the manner in which choosing different goals, causal theories, or methods affect policy content and implementation, but to the way in which these different elements of policy content systematically impact on the other variables. Additionally, non-identical types of policies require distinctly different types and levels of implementation capacity and contexts, and are predisposed to influence varying levels of implementer commitment, and composition and disposition of clients and coalitions.

2.4.2 Context

Numerous authors have drawn from (micro-) institutional theory, particularly “sociological institutionalism” (Giddens, 1981; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991), to point out that

implementation agencies and agents are ensconced in the broader social systems that “structure the perceptions, resources, and participation of those actors” (Sabatier, 1986, p. 35). Likewise, bottom-down scholars are in agreement that the manner in which agencies and agents implement policy is invariably contingent on and embedded in the “political, social and economic conditions of the local environment... [and] the larger environment...” (Berman, 1978, pp. 17-25). However, O’Toole (1986, p.202) cautions against a catchall expansive conception of context postulated as a black box variable of everything social, economic, political and legal that does not adequately explicate the effects of contextual facets on implementation: “the field of implementation has yet to address, as part of its research strategy, the challenge of contextuality, beyond empty injunctions of policy makers, implementers, and researchers to pay attention to social, economic, political and legal setting.”

Heeding O’Toole’s counsel, Najam (1995) takes a view of social context that is more concerned with how the larger context impacts implementation. Najam treats institutional context as a passageway through which policy must traverse as it is translated into action. He identifies three related institutional characteristics concerning the context variable that are required to facilitate meaningful understanding of implementation: (a) key players influencing, or being influenced by, the process; (b) power, interests, and strategies of intra- and inter-organisational units within and between the relevant institutions and their relationships; and (c) the broader nexus of political, cultural, economic, social and legal structures in which key institutional players and organisational units are embedded and operate (Najam, 1995, p.42).

A micro-institutionalist’s explanation of the implementation of public policy commences with an assertion that social service delivery initiatives are ‘real’ only to the extent that they are invariably negotiated (or renegotiated) and enacted (or re-enacted) in the interaction of implementation agents and target groups. From this perspective, service delivery programs as societal institutions are not just products of statutes that adduce policy, but rather are “continuously and dynamically produced and reproduced in the interaction among people, that is, more precisely, among public officials and citizens” (Rice, 2012, p.1043). This view focuses our attention on the fact that, notwithstanding of policy prescripts, the benefits that accrue to clients from social service programs are not fixed. Rather, they are transmitted through the actions of implementing agents, which proceed by way of human interaction and can therefore lead to diverse outcomes contingent upon contextual factors and key players

(Berman, 1978; Lipsky, 1978, 1980). According to Warwick (1982), bureaucratic context conducive to effective implementation more often emerge from human interaction than statutes and hierarchical regulations (in Najam, 1995, p.43). The next chapter elaborates on how human interaction is not only rooted in and moulded by social structures (political, economic, cultural, social systems, and societal systems), but also how these systems and institutions are in turn affected, reinforced, and altered by human action.

Intra- and inter-organisations have characteristics that are institutionalised, the implication of which is that any implementation agency will infuse its own facilitating or constraining elements. Another important element of context is that of mutual adaption between implementing agencies and policy being implemented. On one hand, it is likely that many different agencies will be directly or indirectly engaged in the implementation of a particular policy and program, on the other hand, particular agencies will be directly or indirectly involved in the implementation of many different policies and programs. Such competing agency priority, in conjunction with implementer commitment, will mould the agency's reaction to particular components of particular policies; which, in a similar fashion, could possibly reshape the policy itself.

Leaning on Hanf (1978), Najam (1995) brings to light the interrelationship of implementation actors in functional organisational units in respect of decision-making at different levels. These imply that participants' propensity to attain implementation objectives revolves around not only their preferences and actions but also on those of others. As plainly put by (Najam, 1995, p.42), "actions at one level of decision-making will be influenced by relationships that exist between levels and across operational boundaries." Especial care should therefore be given to standard operating procedures (SOPs) of relevant agencies: how these have been influenced by, or influence, a policy in question; what SOPs might potentially facilitate more effective implementation; and whether particular actor coalitions, changes in policy content, or provision of particular resources (capacity) might facilitate such SOPs.

This line of argumentation moves 'institutional context' from the constraints of administrative concept to a complex political one and underscores the dynamic nature of context as a variable. As Warwick (1982), points out: "Program [context] are (1) multiple; (2) shifting; and (3) difficult to predict in detail before implementation takes place" (in Najam, 1995, p.182). Most importantly, then, the variable of institutional context raises our curiosity to understand the institutional environment, or what Najam calls the "corridor through which

policy must travel” as it translates to action. To underscore the saliency of context, Warwick (1982) found that programs that are successfully carried out link policy aspirations to palpable environmental actualities, whereas those that failed proceed as if the environment is either static or immaterial (in Najam, 1995, p.42).

The compelling weight of the context variable is its contribution to identifying pivotal institutional players, prospective contradictions or conflicts between, and within, such institutions, dynamic and unfolding linkages between the goals of the policy at stake, and how implementing agencies adapt in carrying out tasks. Institutional context will also influence and be influenced by other variables. The characteristics of institutional context, e.g. organisational structure of agencies, procedures, decision-making processes, etc., would also impact upon: types and levels of capacity that may be available to the agency; how clients and coalitions may organize on the issue; and what levels of commitment may be forthcoming.

2.4.3 Commitment

Commitment is a variable fundamentally dealing with the subject matter of how support and discretion combine to impact implementation, in contrast with control from the top. Warwick argues that governments may produce the most coherent and generally laudable policy conceivable, but if those who are charged with actualising it are reluctant or incapable of doing so, it will never see daylight (in Najam, 1995, p.45). This is a position most often associated with bottom-up scholars who focus on commitment of grassroots actors, but it is also considered as compelling by top-down theorists when dealing with implementer “dispositions” (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983).

An extreme top-down perspective would, however, argue that the commitment of grassroots actors is shaped mainly by policy content and capacity (resources), which are purportedly “controlled” from the centre. On the opposite side, a strict bottom-up perspective would consider commitment as principally a function of institutional context and clients and coalitions, over and beyond the influence of policy content and its capacity provision. A synthesis perspective would view these exclusive stresses as misplaced, and argue that commitment is critical at all levels through which policy traverses, and commitment is influenced, and influences, all the other four variables.

The assumption that those who are responsible for framing particular policies are inevitably deemed ‘committed’ is not unequivocal. Research in industrialised (Goggin et al., 1990) and developing (Migdal, 1988; in Najam, 1995) societies alike found varying levels of support across organisational levels for particular policies. Circumstances do prevail in which policies and programs are brought into play purely out of political expediency and convenience rather than commitment. As an example, the Human Rights Commission of South Africa is mandated by section 184 (3) of the constitution of South Africa to demand information to determine “the reasonableness of measures taken including legislation by laws, policies and programmes adopted by organs of state to ensure the realisation of rights ... concerning housing, health care, food, water, social security, education and the environment” (www.sahrc.org.za). Furthermore, there have been landmark rulings by the Constitutional Court of South Africa, the nation’s apex court, ordering organs of state to provide social services so that everyone in South Africa has access to them, particularly the poor, vulnerable and marginalized.

In such cases, then, the dearth of commitment at the top, rather than at the bottom, may be the cause of ineffective implementation. It is also not inconceivable, for example, to have situations where street-level-bureaucrats and top-level decision makers in fact have similar interests but middle-level officials have a lower level of commitment. As a policy moves through various levels, it becomes essential to establish the degree of commitment at all levels. Analysis of the commitment variable should then tally accounts, where discretion and support are combined to impact the process, and show how this impact may be structured to enhance general implementation effectiveness. Whereas macro-level actors should fulfil promised resource transfers and translate policy into priority legislative requirements, this study takes a view that players at micro-level in a bureaucratic complex are equally critical to the effective implementation of social policy – it is there that policy actually translate into action. As Warwick (1982) observed, “implementer discretion is universal and inevitable” (cited by Najam, 1995, p.48).

In a developing country like South Africa, societal structure affects both politics at the highest levels of the state and the administration of policy at much lower levels. Since politics of survival often seem to predominate over other agenda items, the commitment to policy of micro-implementers is especially critical, because through each encounter between grassroots actors and clients, this unique proximity to the human dimension of local problems would represent ‘an instance of policy delivery’. This means that (a) street-level bureaucrats’

priorities are moulded not only by the broader institutional context and their agency, but also by practical realities of their clients, and (b) “the level of discretionary power they usually enjoy grant them the ability to not only influence the implementation of the policy, but to *de facto* ‘define’ policy in action” (Najam, 1995, p.47).

In case of low implementer commitment, a top-down approach recommends controlling discretion either by strengthening the standard operating procedures (context), or designing more stringent evaluation routines within policy (content), or influencing implementer disposition through the provision of additional resources (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). However, in spite of whatever formal structure of authority that is devised, it is not disputed that field workers possess the discretion or ability to derail or advance a program. In the same way that sufficiently motivated field workers can mobilise resources to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles, creative street-level actors can equally employ bureaucratic regulations as one of the devices for sabotage “by working to rule or stalling action by referring procedural minutiae to their superior for clearance” (Warwick, 1982, in Najam, 1995, p.48). Warwick goes further to caution that “the true test of commitment is not whether implementers execute a policy when their superiors force them to, but whether they carry out a policy when they have the option of not doing so” (Najam, 1995, p.48).

Warwick’s foregoing caveat finds traction in Weick’s (1993, 1995) assertion that commitment is a reference point for sensemaking. The basic idea, according to Weick (1993, p.19), is “normally, when people act, their reasons for doing things are self-evident or uninteresting, especially when their actions themselves can be undone, minimised, or disowned.” Drawing from this framework, the next chapter links commitment to other variables by elaborating on how commitment is grounded in social relationships, justified by social structure, and that justifications are necessary to provide purpose for organisational actors and rationale for the client and coalition, who are often unclear about organisational goals and theories of causality.

2.4.4 Capacity

A broader conception of implementation capacity in system thinking language refers to the functional, structural and cultural facets that are at play when delivering those public services meant to raise the quality of life of target groups. Both surveys of empirical studies (O’Toole, 1986, 2000) and analytic literature (Najam, 1995) are unanimous that a minimum condition to successfully implement any program is to have the necessary administrative capability:

that is, the requisite resources for effective implementation. As with the earlier variants of implementation research which focused simply on administrative capacity, or more marginally, on “administrative resources”, Najam adopts a definition of capacity from an earlier top-down perspective: “successful implementation is also a function of the implementing organisation’s capacity to do what it is expected to do. According to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975, p.480), the ability to implement policies may be hindered by such factors as overworked and poorly trained staff, insufficient information and financial resources, or impossible time constraints.

Najam concedes though that identifying and providing the necessary resources is not an inconsequential matter. Given the complexity of implementation and potential conflict among multiple actors, knowing and determining exactly what are the necessary resources, ‘who gets what, when, how, where, and from whom’ is a political rather than a logistic problem. The crucial question to ponder, then, in considering how capacity may impinge on implementation is not merely one of “what and where capacity is required?”, but also understanding “how this capacity can be created and operationalised” (Najam, 1995, p.49). Najam argues that the first task to understand this variable is to clarify the subtle structural and functional difference between “capacity logistics” and “capacity politics.” The former are levels of administrative capacity mandated in the policy and available to relevant implementing agencies. The latter entails the difficult task of identifying the nature and magnitude of capacity needed at certain levels of the administrative pecking order to actualise effective implementation.

Whereas the most legitimate source of capacity requirements are the implementing agencies themselves, these agencies have a vested interest in exaggerating this assessment. Agencies and agents themselves have incomplete information of the ‘real’ magnitude of the capacity required. Information about the type and extent of capacity needed, at what levels of the administrative ladder, and in which particular agencies, often only become fully realised once implementation actually commences; and then it also tends to be revised as the process unfolds. In conjunction with our stated framing of policy as a moving target, the initial task in trying to understand capacity is to identify and index levels of administrative capacity as sanctioned by policy content. However, for effective implementation to be realised, policy content may need to adapt in response to new emerging implementation circumstances and needs.

In addition to the challenges of the need to adjust both administrative capacity and policy content to evolving requirements, Najam (1995, p.50) identifies at least two levels of “bureaucratic politics” which need to be unravelled: intra- and inter-agency politics. At intra-agency level, officials at various levels and sections of the same agency are likely to identify mixed capacity requirement. To illustrate, those dealing with the technical aspects might place highly skilled human resources at a premium, while those entrusted with operational logistics might consider the size of field staff or physical facilities (e.g. vehicles) as more important. Moreover, middle- and bottom-level actors are unlikely to wield sufficient influence on capacity politics to meet their requirements, and may, therefore, often be sidelined, leading to less effectual implementation.

At the level of inter-agency politics, different agencies may contend for resources in the same policy space, or for competing priorities. As an example, infrastructure, land and housing departments at municipal, provincial and national level may simultaneously have competitive and cooperative relationships, when simultaneously expected to cooperate to implement a national human settlement policy, while also competing for the same pot of scarce resources. Also, even if they are competing internally, they may also be colluding with each other to ensure that the resources in question are, in fact, earmarked for human settlement programs, and not for some other rival social programs. Hence, implementation effectiveness, may often hinge on the dynamic balance of bureaucratic power that results.

The multiple levels of bureaucratic politics in terms of intra- and inter agency capacity underscore the need to consider the ‘5Cs’ protocol in its entirety. The interplay between policy content adaptation and capacity requirements is apparent in that the two will essentially (re-)define each other. The balance of power between relevant agencies traced above is a function of institutional context and administrative capacity, which in turn will impact upon implementation effectiveness. The type and levels of capacity requirement most suited to agencies are likely to be shaped by relevant standard operating procedures of these agencies, and vice versa. Similarly, the fact that commitment can be affirmed through additional capacity provision also implies that the level of commitment for a said program will be a determinant of the extent and nature of capacity required.

Whilst Najam (1995, p.49) acknowledges the value of the intent of a broader conception of capacity for certain types of policies, he dismisses it as an “analytically unmanageable” explanatory variable because “it is likely to lead only to very general conclusions that risk

ignoring, or missing, the intricacies of the issue.” This research, however, takes a different view to Najam’s explicit antipathy towards the wider, all-inclusive, conception of capacity. Through the lens of a sensemaking view of knowledge, the next chapter examines how the interplay of knowledge dynamics at different levels of organisational sensemaking can enable implementing agencies to optimally use resources at their disposal to improve services. Then, by linking institutions to actions, an analysis of the interaction of the context-capacity variable (chapter 4) will elaborate on how the conditions of material objects as resources capable of producing disparities in social order is not exclusive, but contingent upon non-material resources.

2.4.5 Client and Coalition

The preceding sections dealt with a cluster of variables in which actors, who formulate policy and those who are entrusted with putting it into action, were directly and formally involved in bureaucratic mechanisms for delivering policy. These variables focused on the ‘official’ actors’ interests and strategies. The fifth variable, clients and coalitions, sought to identify other players who were either directly or indirectly implicated. The aim was to understand their motives, interests and strategies in terms of being implementers and decision makers. The ‘5Cs’ Protocol model recognises that the interactions, among multiple actors operate at different levels, have their own interests and strategies, and would ultimately affect implementation.

There might well be a far bigger array of interest groups impacted by any implementation program than described so far. For parsimony, the analysis of ‘client and coalition’ variable seeks to explicitly identify potentially significant stakeholders, drawn from a constellation of characters in the implementation theatre. The concept of clients as used by Lipsky (1980) and Warwick (1982) refers to target individuals and groups to whom policy is being delivered: “all actors whose behaviour is targeted by the implementation” (Najam, 1995, p.51-52). Coalitions, on the other hand, are influential stakeholders who have an interest in a program or outcome, such as the media, opinion leaders or any other “outside players.” They may vigorously oppose or support a particular policy or a case of implementation. Their individual behaviour may not be directly affected, but they have adequate motivation and ability to actively pursue particular outcomes.

According to Bayrakal (2006, p.138), both clients and coalitions may have “interests that are aligned with policy or conflict with it and, as result, take strategic action to contribute to, or

detract from its implementation.” If they presume benefits to accrue from the policy outcome, their support for and commitment to the policy are likely to rise. If benefits are not expected, support and commitment might be withdrawn or significantly reduced. A helpful statement to invoke at this point is Elmore’s (1979, p.610) observation that the finding that “implementation is affected, in some critical sense, by formation of a coalition of individuals affected by policy is one of the most robust findings of implementation research.” All things considered, the backing of clients and coalitions speaks to a power swing among unlikely interest stakeholders, which may yields a matching shift in the locus of influence (Rein and Rabinovits, 1978; in Najam, 1995, p.51).

As is evident by the continual ‘service delivery protests’ in South African municipalities, target groups (clients) can trigger occasions to speed, slow, halt or redirect implementation. Not only is it important to identify clients recognised by particular policies, but also those that are not recognised. The latter might not only have the incentive, but possess the ability to thwart the implementation of a program, which they might do with great effect in certain cases. Finding a way to incorporate such groups (e.g. as service providers) in many instances is able to convert them from being active opponents to active supporter of programs.

Interest groups identified in developing countries as key players who may facilitate coalition for particular outcomes, but not necessarily incumbents, include politicians, economic elites, opinion leaders, mass media, etc. (Grindle, 1980; Migdal, 1988; in Najam 1995, p.53). Other potentially important coalition partners, not identified in the literature, include non-governmental organisations (NGOs), traditional authorities (in rural districts), and, in the case of international regimes, international institutions including donor agencies. The resources such actors harness can significantly tilt the balance of power between the relevant constellations of implementation players. Although an assortment of such groups may have little else in common, they are often gatekeepers for programs to the communities in which they have vested interests. In an empirical study of population policy implementation in eight developing countries, Warwick (1982) identifies gatekeepers for population issues as: “herbalists, midwives, mullahs and parish priests... family planning is also affected by persons with regional and national influence, including journalists, party leaders, elected officials and intellectuals” (in Najam, 1995, p.53). Warwick’s study shows that defining coalitions should focus “not only on cataloguing the interests and strategies of various stakeholders but categorising these actors along clusters of potentially allying interests” (in Najam, 1995, p.54). This implies that simple convergence of interests among unlikely

partners does not necessarily translate to formal coalition, and, thus, necessitates employing different strategies when dealing with each of these groups.

Like other variables, the makeup of clients and coalitions will influence, and be influenced, by other variable clusters. The clients and coalitions that policy designers recognise are reflected in policy goals, problem definition and method. However, once stated in policy content, these are likely to spawn new coalitions. Migdal (1988, in Najam, 1995, p.54) found that perceived or real weakness of the institutional context at various levels of governance and local realities are likely to influence the makeup of clients and coalitions. Deficiencies with regard to essential capacity requirement are also likely to strengthen the hands of opposing clients and coalition, as influential coalitions shift the balance of power by enhancing additional capacity. The linkage to commitment is, in most cases, very strong. For example, it is expected that grassroots players will be far more committed to programs that elicit strong client backing than the ones that do not. Warwick (1982) reminds us: “the transaction most vital to implementation are those between the programs and the clients. No amount of success on other fronts can compensate for the rejection of a program by its intended clients” (in Najam, 1995, p.54).

To recapitulate, Najam’s (1995) ‘5Cs’ protocol model demonstrates the value of an analysis of cases of implementation based on combining clusters of variables from both top-down and bottom-up approaches and the strategic use of linkages of critical variables. What distinguishes Najam’s model from other attempts to synthesise elements from top-down and bottom-up perspectives, is that it does not merely combine factors believed to affect implementation from both streams, but also explores the theoretical relationship among them. This approach, according to Bayrakal (2006, p.129), “can help overcome the policy ‘implementation gap’ ... identify those factors related to implementation that contribute to, or detract from, the achievement of policy success.”

The pivotal question at the very basis of the contestation between top-down and bottom-up proponents still lingers. It speaks to the kinds of policies in which policy designers’ plans are accorded normative value greater than the general consequences of the implementation action, as well as those of other stakeholders. In contrast to combining variables from the two main implementation perspectives, the ensuing sections of this chapter explore Matland’s (1995) ambiguity-conflict model. Matland explores implementation conditions under which either bottom-up or top-down approaches might be appropriate. The model allows us to make

predictions about how the implementation process is likely to unfold based on levels of policy ambiguity and conflict

2.5 Ambiguity and Conflict Model

Matland (1995) draws from studies of rational models on decision-making assumptions to relate different types of implementations to different methods of decision making. Decision-making scholars and organisational theorists have devoted considerable time and effort studying the effect of conflict and ambiguity on decision-making (Lue & Raiff, 1970; Lave & March, 1981; Allison, 1971; Halper, 1971; in Matland, 1995, p.156). According to Matland, conflict has a direct bearing when making distinctions between descriptions of the different types of implementation processes; not quite unlike the manner in which conflict is systematically implicated in decision-making models.

When policy goals are agreed upon, such as in a widely agreed initiative to engender social capital and forge public goodwill for the general welfare (e.g. distributive policies), a problem that implementation seeks to address is defined in terms of “finding the best way to attain an agreed-upon goal” (Matland, 1995, p.156). On the flip side, when there is lack of agreement on goals (e.g. redistributive or regulatory policies), “bureaucratic politics’ models of decision-making” posit that bargaining or coercive methods are often used to ensure compliance (Matland, 1995, p.156).

2.5.1 Policy Conflict and Ambiguity

Differences regarding proposed policy goals, or deciding the choice of tools to carry out a particular policy, give rise to conflict when there is “interdependence of actors, incompatibility of objectives and perceived zero-sum element of interactions” (Dahrendorf, 1958, in Matland, 1995, p.156). Top-down proponents view conflict as a subjective variable which can be manipulated and reduced by policy designers. Among those strategies suggested to lessen conflict are: designating policy that is responsive to grassroots adaptation; or the use of resources as sanctions or incentives; or rescaling a project to weaken antagonism or cap interdependence. Bottom-up authors, on the other hand, take the position that, owing to the subject matter, policy conflict is integral to implementation and cannot be manipulated (Berman, 1978).

Policy ambiguity, according to Matland (1995, p.157), stems from numerous sources that can be broadly linked to two basic categories: ambiguity of means and ambiguity of goals. The many ways in which ambiguity of means manifests include: instances in which there exist

scarcity of the technology and skills required to carry out tasks; uncertainty pertaining to the responsibility of a broad range of players and agencies; a complex environment complicating the selections of tools to employ, the manner to deploy them, and the purpose. Goal ambiguity often leads to the breakdown of implementation owing to the misconceptions, disagreements and uncertainty it creates. Matland (1995, p.159) identifies a few aspects of implementation that are directly influenced by ambiguity: “the likelihood that policy is uniformly understood across implementation sites; the ability of superiors to monitor activities; the probability that local contextual factors play a significant role; and the degree to which relevant actors vary across implementation sites.”

To help us define a set of conditions under which policy recommendation will be effective, Matland (1995) identifies four policy implementation paradigms based on the policy’s levels of ambiguity and conflict.

2.5.2 Administrative Implementation

Cases of implementation in this category are marked by the absence of conflict, consensus and clarity about policy goals as well as means for solving existing problems (Matland, 1995, p.161). These are the preconditions for a rational decision-making process. Information is communicated explicitly from the top in a well-ordered hierarchical manner, such that lower level actors have an unambiguous understanding of their responsibility and duties. Thus, classic top-down models dominate implementation; and resources are key determinants of implementation outcomes (Matland, 1995, p.162).

Policy implementation in this category closely parallels the strong-statute of Ingram and Schneider (1990). According to Etzioni (1961), compliance is ensured by: (a) normative mechanisms which are induced through reference to mutually held goals or to the legitimacy of central players; (b) coercive mechanism, although seldom used because instructions are perceived as legitimate; and (c) remunerative mechanisms such as inducements, which are mobilised from additional resources pulled from outside to boost the commitment of grassroots actors (in Matland, 1995, p.161).

2.5.3 Experimental Implementation

Policies in this category are characterised by high levels of ambiguity and insignificant levels of conflict (Matland, 1995, p.165). According to Matland, ambiguity may arise from a lack of clarity of either goals and means, or when goals are agreed on, and generally supported, but not the means to attain them at institutional, agency, or individual level. Owing to lack of

conflict and the array of actors involved, problems and solutions combine to produce outcomes that vary from site to site and are difficult to foresee (Matland, 1995, p.166).

Matland claims that implementation outcomes are driven by contextual conditions in the sense that actors who have strong interest, or access to ample resources, or proximity to the place where decisions are made, are in a position to mould implementation significantly. Similarly Ingram and Schneider (1990, p.80) refer to the kind of policy making that sets the scene for implementation as the “grassroots approach to statutory design” and argue that “good implementation emanate from mutual adaptation and learning at the grassroots level.”

Matland (1995, p.167) claims that the downside of ambiguous policies is that they encourage partial accountability, and can breed mini fiefdoms in which leading players pursue their self-interests at the expense of broader public interests. Since tolerance of ambiguity is better explained by bottom-up than top-down approach, the former’s description of conditions is superior to the latter (Matland, 1995, p.167). To this end, ambiguity should be seen as providing an opportunity to learn both new means and set new goals (Ingram & Schneider, 1990, p.80; Mischen & Sinclair, 2007, p.154).

2.5.4 Political Implementation

Political implementation occurs when policy goals are clearly defined, or there is little or no ambiguity about how to accomplish them, but there exists a high level of conflict over explicit policy goals that remain unresolved (Matland, 1995, p.163). Such conflict may ultimately result from clashing values and beliefs (Ingram & Schneider, 1990), or attributable to opposing views, regarding preference of means to achieve clearly defined goals. According to Mischen and Sinclair (2007, p.159), conflict may ensue “between winning and losing political factions that exist within the community.” To ensure that opposition does not undermine implementation outcomes, compliance of actors or advocacy coalitions who control resources and wield power is crucial. Bargaining mechanisms are used to arrive at a settlement on means; that is, when agreement on goals is needless, negotiated agreement on action is adequate (Matland, 1995, p.163).

Implementation outcomes are dependent on the control of resources and use of power. Newer top-down models (e.g. Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1989) appropriately capture the essence of implementation under these conditions by addressing the failing of an earlier standard administrative view to understand what essentially a political problem is. The argument by

bottom-uppers that policies are decided at micro-level fails to satisfactorily account for the considerable coercion and power exerted on a problem that is explicitly defined.

2.5.5 Symbolic Implementation

Matland (1995, p.168) argues that implementation in this category is characterised by both high levels of conflict and high levels of ambiguity. High levels of conflict make symbolic implementation policies exhibit similarities to political implementation. Policies invoke highly salient symbols; that is, they have “vague referential goals” and an equivocal “program of action” (Matland, 1995, p.168). As a result, there exists a proliferation of multiple interpretations when competing interest groups attempt to translate abstract aspirations into practical action. A coalition faction at a local site which controls existing resources determines implementation outcome.

Actors are passionately involved, disagreements are resolved through coercion or bargaining, and problem-solving and persuasion are used to a limited degree only. Neither the top-down nor the bottom-up approach appears to explain appropriately the conditions of implementation (Matland, 1995; p.170). While macro level actors still command some influence because of control over resources and provision of incentives, their power and ability to ensure and monitor compliance is diminished by high levels of policy ambiguity. The central role of local actors at the local level vindicates the bottom-up approach, but fails to emphasise the dominant nature of political interactions at the local level.

In summary, the aforementioned four types of implementation and related central principles driving implementation outcomes illustrate and underscore an argument that ambiguity can be useful in facilitating agreement at both policy formulation and implementation phases. This implies that less explicit policy can help reduce conflictual battles arising from strongly held divergent values and beliefs, and provide an opportune occasion to adapt policy goals and learning of new technologies and methods. Therefore, while ambiguity is often blamed for implementation failure, it can create an environment which allows for widespread variation of policy interpretation, enhance meaning making dimension, and facilitates knowledge creation, which should be actively encouraged and nurtured.

According to Matland, a top-down approach provides a correct description of implementation, when there is slight or no ambiguity surrounding policy goals or means to accomplish goals, and levels of conflict are either high or low. Macro-implementation players dominate the implementation process. Outcomes are determined by the control of resources

and power residing central players. When policy goals, or means, are ambiguous, and conflict is high or low, and the requirements are non-prescriptive, grassroots player dominate, and bottom-up approaches allow suitable description of implementation. Outcomes vary from site to site and depend heavily on the grassroots actors and local context.

2.6 Conclusion

A review of policy implementation literature in this chapter demonstrates that implementation is a problem-solving phenomenon that encompasses both multi-layered political processes and administrative behavioural elements. Furthermore, implementation behaviours are moulded by the decision-making setting and the kind of policy at stake. The remaining chapters will expand on a view of implementation as taking many forms and shapes in diverse cultures and institutional settings. It is process that involves diverse operational players at various levels extending over a diverse spectrum of possibilities between and within organisations. An understanding of policy implementation in this research builds on Berman's (1978, p.160) sentiment that "the article of faith that unites implementation analysis... [is] a belief that carrying out policy is neither automatic nor assured." As Najam (1995, p.22) appropriately asserts, implementation is "a complex, dynamic, multi-level, multi-actor, process influenced both by the content and context of the policy being implemented."

Najam (1995) identifies the five critical variables of policy implementation and argues that all the variables are likely to act together, with any change in one prompting changes in others. Najam's model attempts to capture the complexity of implementation, something which is acknowledged by many scholars in the literature. That said, not all cases of implementation are expected to be dynamic and complex in the same way. Some variables are probably more discernibly dynamic and complex than others, contingent on the peculiarities inherent in an implementation episode. The ultimate purpose of implementation analysis, as envisioned by the Najam, is to understand how to manipulate the variables and link them, so as to match policy with preferred goals.

To mitigate lack of prescriptive quality in policy, for instance, Najam (1995) suggests that some variables can be directly "controlled" and "fixed" so as to induce adjustments in those variables that cannot be directly manipulated. Najam provides illustrations of situations in which certain variables, or their interconnectedness, might influence implementation more than others. Whilst the illustrations are useful tools to anchor theorisation, they lack

explanatory power to sufficiently explicate general conditions under which some variables are more appropriate than others. The interconnection of these variables presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Making sense of consequential complexity, occasioned by dynamic interlinkages of the variables, constitutes a veritable challenge. The inescapable complexity of the implementation process and the saliency of efforts to understand it highlight the imperative to identify and unravel underlying factors implicated in implementation effectiveness.

Critical to the recognition of complexity as endemic to the policy process is a view of implementation as a dynamic process of negotiation, involving several actors operating at intra- and inter organisational levels. This recognition presents an opportunity because, once the initial investment is made in understanding complexity, strategically manipulating the variables enables us to influence both implementing agents and the environment.

Complexity highlight the fact that implementation should not be planned, discharged or enacted simply as a series of activities according to some prearranged strategy. Instead, it is a process that should, at the very best, be steered towards better desired outcomes. While Najam embraces the notion that implementation is “political process, rather than a mechanical administrative one”, he does not identify the factors that contribute to making implementation either political or administrative.. He neither elaborates on conditions under which macro-level planners wield considerable influence, nor where micro-level actors dominate.

Through analysis of policy type characteristics, Matland’s the ambiguity-conflict model provides policy designers and practitioners with a route map to the conditions and factors likely to most significantly influence how implementation will unfold. Greater clarity in goal setting potentially risks conflict, and so one of the avenues to attenuate conflict is by setting ambiguous goals. This alludes to an inverse relationship between ambiguity and goal conflict. As a policy becomes more unequivocal, the likelihood of unfavourable effects to the self-interests and turf of various players becomes more apparent, and they react by seeking to dilute the latitude and reach of policy to retain prevailing customary bureaucratic routines, practices and power.

Matland does not, however, distinguish between policy uncertainty and ambiguity. He neither provides an articulation which allows us to understand the dynamics of policy equivocality and policy conflict, nor how to reduce multiple, conflicting interpretations and

interests, especially at micro-implementation level. Instead of taking as given, constraints imposed by the implementation context, distributed information, differentials in power and vested interest, a sensemaking framework (chapter 3) encourages an analytical focus of our attention to processes by means of which equivocality, and conflict in organisational life, are created, sustained and thus can be mitigated. In this equivocal situation of confusion, actors at all levels are not sure what questions to ask, nor do they expect clear answers even if they do know the right questions (Daft & Lengel, 1986, in Weick, 1993, p.15). Mechanisms to reduce equivocality and conflict require an understanding of the nature of information, and communication transactions that can overcome different frames of references or clarify ambiguous issues.

Both Najam and Matland's models recognise that the two main streams of policy implementation comprise kernels of truth applicable in most cases of implementation. While Najam acknowledges that the complexity is inherent in many situations where programmes are implemented, he assumes that some variables can be held constant. The assumption is premised on the idea that implementation cannot be seen as an activity to be planned and carried out according to a carefully predetermined plan. This thesis will argue in the next chapters that implementation is a process that can only, at the very best, be managed. Managing it entails identifying which, amongst the five variables, define the main stumbling blocks, or can be better influenced, for each case of implementation to arrive at the desired outcome. Matland's topology of implementation context adds a new dimension to the '5Cs' protocol model by adducing strategic insights that enable us to identify the kind of policies in which some variables are likely to be manifestly complex in some situations rather than in others.

A review of sensemaking framework in the next chapter will provide viable mechanism to examine implementation activities in a way that is broad, richer and different from conventional theories of implementation.

Chapter 3

Sensemaking

3.1 Introduction

Consistent with Karl Weick's (1995, p.xi) precaution, this chapter uses sensemaking concepts to develop "ideas with explanatory possibilities, rather than a body of knowledge... a frame of mind about frames of mind... a set of heuristics rather than algorithm" to address the complexity and dynamic process of policy implementation. Policy implementation activities lend themselves to sensemaking efforts when expected outputs are construed as different from policy objectives, or when there is no self-evident way to engage with variation in implementation processes. Applying sensemaking to explore implementation requires us to view the implementation process as a phenomenon that unfolds in the flux of the daily life of an implementing agency and agents rather than as outcomes of manipulation of variables in accordance with the anticipated outcomes we want.

In essence, rather than focusing on the consequence of implementation, this research will use sensemaking concepts to understand the social processes of what occurs during implementation that contribute to programmatic performance. Furthermore, by using a sensemaking perspective, we are able to focus on how subtle elements of policy intentions can be explored, interpreted and understood collectively within implementing agencies at macro-, meso-, and micro-level. It allows concepts to emerge at the collective level of implementation, which enables us to gain understanding of the social dynamics at play, so that we are better able to judge what 'implementation success' might entail.

The basic idea of a sensemaking framework is that organisational actors selectively 'extract cues' when faced with a novel, puzzling, or troubling series of events, and respond to it in an ongoing flux of organisational endeavours. The perception or interpretation of what accounts for a meaningful cue is shaped by the underlying assumptions that stem from prior experiences. These assumptions also influence actions in response to the extracted cue, and the consequences of such actions in turn have a bearing on future assumptions. From this perspective, implementation is an ongoing social process that is comparatively retrospective and is driven by a plausible appreciation of events and actions in a given situation. It is not aimed at achieving objective accuracy based on rational weighing up of facts, or the contemplation of alternatives at the time.

To make the point that sensemaking is about the interplay of action and interpretation, Weick et al. (2005, p.409) build on work by Laroche (1995), Landt (2002) and Weick (1993) to argue that “when action is the central focus, interpretation, not choice, is the core phenomenon.” Like sensemaking, the problem of the implementation process is compounded because the terrain and expectations “keep changing and the task is to carve out some momentary stability in the continuous flow” (Weick, 1993, p.15). Pressman & Wildavsky (1973) recognised earlier on that the implementation of public policy transcends the mere relaying of instruction from the political elites to the periphery (in Winter, 2002). Implementation activities include negotiation and mediation, during which individuals and groups make their own interpretations and express such in an effort to influence how others make sense of and carry out tasks.

Implementation research can be viewed on a spectrum, from those approaches which emphasise the supremacy of macro-level influence to those which rely on the primacy of micro-level processes. The latter seeks to offset the dominance of the former. It does this by focusing on the interaction of policy formulation with the flexibility of discretion at local settings and the radical impossibility of meaningfully separating policy design from action. Spillane et al, (2002) and Winter (2002) argue that there is general agreement that agents (as a collective and individuals) have their own frames of reference and agendas, and these factors together with local settings, often considerably shape what is enacted in practice. Sensemaking and micro-institutionalism thus provide us with promising concepts to examine the processes and mechanisms by which the micro side of implementation shapes macro perspectives (Weick, 1993, p.13).

To provide substance to this promise, the remainder of this chapter sets the scene to implicate sensemaking in implementation activities in the next chapter by addressing the following issues. First, Karl Weick’s (1995) seven properties of organisational sensemaking are explored. Second, we review the salient features used to conceptualise sensemaking. After an overview on the nature of sensemaking, the third section elaborates on the social process of sensemaking among larger groups of diverse organisational actors in ongoing, and quite commonplace, meaning-making processes over extended periods of time. This involves examining the mechanisms by which a diverse range of stakeholders attempt to shape the sensemaking other in heterogeneous patterns of interaction across a broader range of situations (sensegiving).

To advance our understanding of the implementation process as a problem solving enterprise, the fourth section examines the three properties of those environments deemed crucial to enrich the likelihood that organisational actors will respond to the disharmony arising between what is happening (problem definition) and what is desired (goals). After reviewing some ideas that see problems as a kind of gap, difference or disparity, the fifth and sixth sections look more closely at how sensemaking allows actors to deal with uncertainty, ambiguity and conflict by creating a decision-making environment enabling the production of rational and comprehensible accounts.

The seventh section examines how varying organisational sensemaking processes at individual, organisational and cultural levels contribute to knowledge creation. Taking a multi-layered view of organisational sensemaking processes (intra-subjective, intersubjective, generic subjective and extra-subjective) as a departure point allows us to explore the nature of knowledge as both a principal element and end result of sensemaking. The section focuses on the processes by which knowledge is produced and exploited, their continuous interplay, as well as knowledge dynamics and tensions among the levels. Lastly, the eighth section explores how the wider context is both antecedent to, and emergent, from the sensemaking process.

3.2 Defining Sensemaking

Stated broadly, sensemaking is a social constructionist process in which individuals impose meanings on issues and their experiences. Building on Weick (1979) and Chittipeddi's (1991) work, Thomas et al. (1993, p.240) write that the essence of a well-established conception of the sensemaking process is that it "involves the reciprocal interaction of information seeking, meaning ascription, and action." These three aspects of the sensemaking process are theorised to have a discernible influence on an organisation's performance. Information seeking refers to "scanning" both the internal and external environment for significant elements, events and issues that might impact on an organisation's effectiveness and bear on its future performance (Daft & Weick, 1984).

Gioia (1986) argues that the process of 'meaning ascription' or interpretation consists of the "fitting of information into some structure for understanding and action" (in Thomas et al., 1993, p.241). The primary premise of interpretation is that organisational actors use relevant labels, or frames, to describe and categorise salient strategic issues as a way to pull together action in a particular direction. Action, in this context, is the medium through which

decisions are executed, predicated on information seeking strategies and ensuing interpretations of strategic information so as to bring significant change in ongoing organisational practices in order to improve performance and outcomes (Ginsberg, 1988; in Thomas et al., 1993).

There is considerable variation in how the notion of sensemaking is understood in the literature. These revolve around two essential features of sensemaking: where and when it transpires. Some scholars regard sensemaking as a predominantly individual cognitive process that primarily happens in the mind (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Louis, 1980; Klein, Moon & Hoffman, 2006; in Maitlis & Christianson, 2015, p.58), and others conceive of it as a process of social and discursive construction that unfolds through interaction among individuals and groups (Weick, 1995; Colville, & Carter, 2003; Maitlis, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005; Maitlis & Christianson, 2015). Another key deviation relates to the “temporal orientation of sensemaking” (Maitlis 2005, p.94). Whereas sensemaking has conventionally been conceived as an activity that occurs only when one directs attention to actions that had happened in the past, there is mounting interest in those aspects of sensemaking that are characterised as “prospective” or “future-oriented” (Gephart et al., 2010; in Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p.68) or “future perfect thinking” (Weick, 1995, p.29; Colville, & Carter, 2003, p.8). These varied approaches to studies of sensemaking demonstrate the different mechanisms by which sensemaking is realised, and how it may suggest particular outcomes.

Despite underlying ontological differences, there are a myriad recurring themes reflected in various definitions. First, sensemaking is triggered when we encounter an event, issue or action in an ongoing flow of events that is in some way unexpected, concerning or inexplicable; we then try, more or less consciously, to attempt to wrap our mind around it – i.e. make sense of it (Cecez-Kecmanovica et al., 2002, p.4; Maitlis, 2005, p.21). According to Weick (1995, p.50), we notice, bracket, label, focus on and *extract cues* from the environment in the flow of our experiences, which are “elements from the context and past events... familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring.” Daft and Weick (1984, p.287) also noted earlier on how context influences what is extracted as a cue and determines the meaning of a noticed cue, owing to the “relationships among scanning, interpretation and learning.” We find these cues often disconfirm our assumptions, violate our expectations, interrupt ongoing activity, and they are typically prominent in sensemaking activities.

Second, one of the distinctive features of sensemaking is its focus on retrospection. Weick (1995, p.24) argues that the imposition of meanings on cues extracted in the present moment “influence what is discovered when people glance backwards.” The main idea of *retrospective* sensemaking is that people rely on similar events from the past to construct meaning of what is happening in the present. Furthermore, events must be noticed prior to being interpreted and understood. Explicitly, Weick (1995, p.24) writes: “people can know what they are doing only after they have done it.” The implication of the retrospective characteristic of sensemaking is that the noticing and bracketing of cues for whatever is happening at a particular moment is guided by perpetual frameworks, or a frame of reference acquired from prior training, work or life experience (Weick et al, 2005, p.411).

Third, sensemaking is understood as a dynamic process that is *ongoing*; a “recurring cycle comprised of a sequence of events occurring over time” (Louis, 1980; in Weick, 1995, p.4). Weick (1995, p.43) expands on the widespread recognition that “people are always in the middle of things” to highlight the ramifications of this insight for sensemaking. Building on Heidegger’s idea (in Winograd & Flores, 1986) that people are always “thrown” into ongoing situations, Weick (1995, p.43) implicates sensemaking by arguing that, “to make sense of what is happening, people chop moments out of continuous flows and extract cues from those moments.”

Fourth, sensemaking is considered as a *social* process since our experiences, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and assumptions are often swayed by “actual, imagined, or implied presence of others” (Allport, 1985; in Weick, 1995, p.39). According to Maitlis and Christianson, (2014, p.66), when people attempt to “make sense of the unknown” and extract meaning from objects, situation or events, they negotiate, test, co-create, and produce shared or inter-subjective meaning in ways that is close enough to “allow coordinated action.” Furthermore, Weick (1995, p.42) argues that “sensemaking is also social when people coordinate their actions on grounds other than shared meanings, but, rather on the experience of the collective action that is shared.”

The critical fifth facet of sensemaking relates to actions that actors perform in organisations to “produce part of the environment they face” (Weick, 1995, p.30). For Weick, the organisational environment is not a “monolithic, singular, or fixed” space that is set apart from, or external to actors. Weick (1995, p.31) employs the word *enactment* to capture the idea that when actors take actions in organisations “they create the material that becomes the constraints and opportunities they face.” In this respect, action is crucial to sensemaking

because it affects meaning in many ways other than simply producing outcomes: “the act that never gets done, gets done too late, gets dropped too soon, for which the time never seems right is seldom a senseless act” (Weick, 1995, p37). This implies that thinking and action define one another since action-meaning cycles occur frequently as individuals build up tentative understandings that they persistently enact and amend.

To explore how sense is made within organisations, Weick (1995) provides a much deeper exposition of sensemaking that enlightens us to what is distinctively organisational about organisational sensemaking. The approach is grounded on two assumptions: a) sensemaking is moored in social construction, and b) thinking and action define one another. He lays out the characteristics of sensemaking into seven components: (a) rooted in the construction of individual and organisational identity; (b) retrospective in nature; (c) based on enacting a ‘sensible’ environments to deal with; (d) fundamentally social and not an individual process; (e) an ongoing process that must be segmented or bracketed; (f) focused on cues in the environment, and focused by cues from the environment; and (g) driven by plausibility, not accuracy, of conceivable interpretations. According to Gililand and Day (2000), identity construction and plausibility are two widely acknowledged compelling benchmarks of sensemaking, which serve as elementary properties that draw a distinction between sensemaking and cognitive psychology (in Weick et al., 2005, p.416). The other five properties resonate variously as common themes in sensemaking research.

Identity construction is of central importance in Weick’s (1995, p.20) theorising, not only because sensemaking begins with the sensemaker, but because, he notably observed, that sensemakers primarily seek to construct the meaning of their selves and the world outside of themselves, which in both instances is dynamic and interdependent. Explicitly, Weick (1995, p.20) writes: “whenever I define self, I define ‘it’, but to define it is also to define self. Once I know who I am then I know what is out there. But the direction of causality flows just as often from the situation to a definition of self as it does the other way.” An understanding of self does not, however, occur in abstraction, but is anchored in and emergent from the process of social interaction from which a constellation of identities is formed and continually redefined: “to shift among interactions is to shift among definitions of self” (Weick, 1995, p.20). Also, Weick cites Dutton and Dukerich (1991) to make the link between personal identities and how others view the organisation they are associated with. A positive organisational image motivates actors to preserve it, whilst they will try to mend a negative one through disassociation and association (p.21).

Weick (1995, p.56) relies on studies of managerial thinking by Isenberg (1986) and Sutcliffe (1994) to support an argument that “accuracy is nice but not necessary” in any analysis of sensemaking. From this standpoint, the strength of sensemaking is that it is driven by plausibility rather than flawless object perception and getting things right. Rather, sensemaking is concerned with: invention, creation, coherence, pragmatism, instrumentality, and reasonableness; accounts that are acceptable and credible; and an engaging story that brings together and holds disparate elements sufficiently long to fuel, guide and sustain action (Weick, 1995, p.61). Owing to pressures on time and effort in the light of ongoing projects, social obligations and other organisational demands, current situations or problems need not necessarily be perceived meticulously to come up with a solution; instead, actors perform tasks laudably simply by making sense of a situation or events in a manner that would seem to gravitate towards overall long-term goals. To this end, sensemaking is about linking a cue or a singular reference point with a more general notion. According to Weick (1988, p.307), this action-taking approach generates novel data and prospects for interaction that reinforce or constrain the sense of what is transpiring, and “tends to confirm preconceptions which shaped the action in the first place.”

In summary, together and individually, Weick’s (1995) seven sensemaking properties are used by other authors (e.g., Maitlis, 2005; Mikkelsen, 2012) to reveal what sensemaking is about, how it works and where it can falter. For the purpose of this thesis, they provide a roadmap of what we need to look for if we want to understand the implementation process as the pivotal linkage among policy objectives, programs and practice, and policy outcomes. Rather than focusing on outcomes, the sensemaking framework suggests that we focus our attention on the processes that contribute to policy outcomes. While each property relates to each other, since all seven incorporate key aspects of sensemaking, (such as perception, interpretation, and action), researchers acknowledge that either one or another could be more dominant in any particular situation (Weick et al., 2005). The ensuing section sets the stage that will enable us to substantially draw from the sensemaking framework’s analytical repertoire to reframe the analysis of its salient features for policy implementation.

3.3 Sensemaking and Sensegiving

In studies in which the focus is on the manner in which actors attempt to “influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others towards a preferred redefinition of organisational reality”, the role of leaders has received particular attention (Gioia &

Chittipeddi, 1991, p.442). Daft and Weick's (1982, p.285) emphasis of significance of sensegiving as a fundamentally senior management activity is unsurprising because "the point at which information converges and is interpreted for organisation level action is assumed to be at the top manager level." Other studies, though, found middle managers to exhibit both upwards and downwards influence through participation in "strategic conversations", synthesising information and facilitating adaptability (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Westley, 1990; in Maitlis, 2005). Owing to their position or role, middle managers are well placed to sell top management's vision to subordinates, establishing short term operational foci of behaviour by formulating action plans in ways in which issues are understood and enacted; and to monitor activities to support top management goals.

One of the features of complexity in the implementation environment arises from the divergent interests of multiple stakeholder groups, which create occasions for top managements to engage in attempts to influence others actors' sensemaking (sensegiving). Sensegiving, in this context, refers to leaders' efforts to provide accounts of events and actions to other actors, aimed at assisting them to make sense of ambiguous and unpredictable issues. Concomitantly, stakeholders ordinarily expect leaders to fulfil this role in organisations (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). When there exist many diverse interest groups who are not likely to arrive at shared accounts of the issues on their own, they perceive a "sensemaking gap" when issues are crucial, but there exists a dearth of the necessary leadership competence with respect to those issues (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007, p.77). According to Maitlis and Lawrence (2007), the idea of "sensemaking gap" provides a general description of the conditions that will trigger or motivate lower level actors and other stakeholders to engage in sensegiving. Applicable across context and players, these conditions attest to practical and political tensions, associated with sensegiving as a process that seeks to influence the interpretation of others and consequently affect their decision making.

Widespread forms of influence associated with attempts to shape the sensemaking of other actors towards a predefined concept of reality include the exchange of ideas. Bargaining and coercion associated with a political process are often not aimed at attempts to shape the sensemaking of others. Behaviours that are generally associated with cases of sensegiving in the literature as efforts to shape meaning construction include promoting a position, justifying a view or calling a meeting in order to influence others' understanding of issues toward a preferred redefinition of organisational reality (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis &

Lawrence, 2007). The relationship between sensegiving and sensemaking is such that when a person engages in sensegiving this potentially affects his/her sensemaking on an issue, while the reverse is not necessarily the case. Not all occasions for and cases of sensemaking entail attempts to shift others' definition of reality. According to Weick (1995), this observation is inevitable, because providing accounts of events or action is always informed by an understanding based on beliefs, past-experiences, current positions and disposition.

Maitlis's (2005) study on the social processes of organisational sensemaking found that sensemaking does occur among a broad set of divergent organisational actors and stakeholders as they deal with an array of issues. She examined the link between patterns of accounts and actions with respect to patterns of interactions that constitute the social process of sensemaking among different leaders, actors and stakeholders in three organisations. Maitlis' study is particularly germane to policy implementation because different players engage in sensemaking from different backgrounds, using different frames of references, which lead them to assume different roles in sensemaking processes. The study shows that the degree of the leaders' engagement in constructing and promoting understanding, and explanations of events and processes, (leader sensegiving), combined with the stakeholders' attempt to shift and shape beliefs about some aspect of the issues and their importance (stakeholder sensegiving), produce four different forms of organisational sensemaking. Based on studying the varying characteristics of the process, each form leads to a distinctive set of outcomes in relation to accounts that are generated and the activities engaged in.

According to Maitlis (2005, p.35-44), the four forms show how accounts are connected to actions by demonstrating how: a) "accounts generated over time and across levels can be unitary or multiple and rich or narrow"; and b) actions linked to the sensemaking processes vary in the extent to which they are consistent or inconsistent. Unitary and rich accounts result from active engagements by multiple actors across all levels, incorporate their construction of issues, and enable a common foundation for a series of actions with consistent foci. Multiple and narrow accounts, on the other hand, can lead to the domination of a particular group of actors, leading to compromise, or negotiated order, or conflict, or complete failure to understand each other, or failure to act collectively.

3.4 Implementation gaps as occasions for sensemaking

Empirical studies of policy implementation abound with accounts of discrepancies between policy intentions and designs, programs and outcomes. The implementation process itself is

characterised as a problem solving activity in the sense that it seeks to address some kind of disparity, difference, or gap, between the way we want a thing to be and the way they are. According to Weick (1995, p.88), the existing state, “the way things are”, and the desired state, “the way we want them to be”, reflects an understanding that “goals evolve and change during action, which means that both the existing and the desired state are fluid.” Since disparities are fluid, they narrow and widen over time as a result of actions taken, gaps may be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for sensemaking. Smith (1988, 1989) argues that for a gap to become an occasion for sensemaking, it must be intractable and matter; that is, it must “warrant a place on one’s agenda” (in Weick, 1995, p.88).

Therefore, disparities or gaps appear as salient, novel, expected and unexpected moments, which provide cues that arrest attention and dare interested parties to persevere in their attempt to make sense of what they have just noticed. Implementation gaps become problems which are “conceptual entities or constructs” placed on the agenda for a “future action and solution effort” (Weick, 1995, p.89). As disparities, they are ‘undesirable situations’ which signify a state of disharmony in the relationship between reality and one’s preference. Weick argues that things are not noticed only when they are undesirable, unusual or novel, in order to be labelled as problems to be solved. He mentions three other situations that could trigger sensemaking: (a) interruption; (b) purposeful initiative, usually in response to an internal or external request for an increase level of conscious attention; (c) actors must experience and recognise discrepancy for sensemaking to start - the mere presence of it is not sufficient (p.91).

Citing Huber and Daft (1987), Weick (1995, p.86) identifies three properties that increase the probability that people, at both micro- and macro-levels of the organisation, will take note of the fact that it is happening, and pursue it: information load, complexity and turbulence. He describes information load as “a complex mixture of quantity, ambiguity, and variety of information that people are forced to process” (p.87). This implies that owing to the sheer volume and density of the information, people will extract, bracket and label certain cues, and disregard large portions in order to manage it. Therefore, “information load forces cues out of an ongoing flow”, and creates an occasion for sensemaking (p.87). Perhaps rather more telling of the information load are the over three hundred key variables identified by O’Toole’s (1986) in his studies of implementation.

A broad definition of complexity refers to a plethora of diverse elements that interact in many different ways. An increase in complexity also affects what people notice and ignore, and can

increase perceived uncertainty (Weick, 1995, p.87). As discussed in chapter 2, a considerable part of implementation literature has been criticized for merely offering a long checklist of variables, but found wanting when it comes to the crucial variables.

Turbulence refers to the frequency of the change in policy as it meanders through the dynamic labyrinth of implementation in combination with the frequency of change of direction. A common observation among various views on turbulence is that as turbulence goes up, people use intuition, heuristics and imitation in decision making (Weick, 1995, p.88). This means that they are more likely to arrive at a decision without understanding all the steps that led to it. In dealing with turbulence, people tend to revert idiosyncratically either to whatever heuristics for noticing they are most familiar with, or to those strategies that are rewarded and practised most often in their organisations.

3.5 Sensemaking perspectives on ambiguity and uncertainty

Sources of policy ambiguity include: goal ambiguity as a result of unclear, multiple and conflicting objectives; poor definition and framing of the problem to be solved, or poor understanding of cause-effect relationships; ambiguity of means that results from a lack of clarity or knowledge base regarding appropriate tools to employ in a complex environment; ambiguity of roles when responsibilities are vague and unclear. Other ways in which ambiguity manifests in organisational life and trigger sensemaking include: multiple and conflicting interpretations; when contradictions and paradoxes appear; scarcity of attention, money or pressure of time; and circumstances where decision-making channels are not fixed (MacCaskey, 1982; in Weick, 1995, p.92-93). Matland (1995) sees conditions such as these as prime sites ripe for misunderstanding, ambiguity and uncertainty that, in turn, contribute to implementation failure. Additionally, ambiguity involves: (a) intentions that admit multiple or conflicting interpretations; (b) outcomes whose characteristics, implications and evaluations are indistinct; and (c) identities whose roles are either not well-defined or the result of construction with equivocal resources.

Weick (1995, p.91) posits that the ‘shock’ attendant to ambiguity, as an occasion for sensemaking, is confusion. This happens when one is not clear on what constitutes a solution to the problem, because the problem was not accurately framed in the first place, or is a complex problem escaping easy framing. Without a clear problem specification, progress in its resolution is not easily recognised. The confusion is occasioned by numerous or conflicting interpretations that lead people to engage in sensemaking. Weick suggests that the

remedy to reduce the ‘shock’ emanating from ambiguity is by contrasting it with a related but different ‘shock’ caused by uncertainty, namely ignorance. What distinguishes ambiguity from uncertainty is that in the latter, people are ignorant of any interpretation, due to a lack of information (not multiple interpretations). Therefore, Weick, (1995, p.95) argues that, when people are confronted with choices about the future regarding the outcomes resulting from a chosen course of action, and if they are to remain operative despite insufficient information, they rely on their pre-existing beliefs that accord with their predispositions towards future possibilities.

According to March (1994), ignorance, as a shock attendant to uncertainty, arises out of “imprecision in estimates of future consequences conditional on present action” (in Weick, 1995, p.95). This failure to anticipate or predict ramifications by deducing from present actions produces an occasion for sensemaking. Drawing from Milliken (1987), Weick (1995, p.92) cites three sites of uncertainty in an organisational context, each of which requires a different type of capability to be detected and coped with: (a) state uncertainty, which stems from misapprehension of shifting, underlying, contextual factors; (b) effect uncertainty, caused by anxiety regarding the implication of changing contextual factors in the organisation; and (c) response uncertainty, weighing a range of possible alternatives available for organisation actors. Work by different scholars (Daft & Macintosh, 1981; Daft & Lengel, 1984; Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987) underlines the kinds of occasions for sensemaking that are constructed when ambiguity and uncertainty are the focus, and delineates different mechanisms to reduce the respective shocks of confusion and ignorance (in Weick, 1995, p.99).

Weick (1995, p.99) suggests that to remove confusion, the medium of communication requires a method of information interchange that is “constructed in face-to-face interaction that provides more varied cues”; i.e., rich media such as meetings that take precedent over formal information systems (e.g. emails) and special reports. On the other hand, ignorance is reduced by the “earliest available information that will show what direction the actor ought to be going because of the way the future of the world is, evidently, turning out” (Weick, 1995, p.99). Additionally, Weick (1995, p.96) argues that from a retrospective sensemaking perspective, information provides certainty for an organisation about the present, which was itself an actual future just before.

The meaning derived from information about the present creates greater certainty as actors reconstruct a history that serves as a plausible explanation for how events unfolded to reach

the place where they are. In the process, information stimulates an occasion for sensemaking and often shows the direction in which the actors ought to be going, or bears on what the organisation should be doing next. The failure to distinguish confusion from ignorance leads to prolonged episodes of sensemaking (Weick, 1995, p.99). This happens when the need for more information (ignorance, uncertainty) is mislabelled as a need for different kinds of information (confusion, ambiguity). A mechanism that might assist in resolving one predicament, may actually hamper the resolution of the other.

Cecez-Kecmanovic (2002) and colleagues conducted an empirical study to investigate the efficacy of emails as a medium of communication during the implementation of a far reaching restructuring initiative at a university. The study concluded that, whereas the head of the university was inundated with emails from staff members regarding his new vision for the institution, the use of emails to share thoughts, suggestions and anxieties failed to reduce misunderstanding. In spite of the fact that he made an effort to personally read and reply to as many of the emails as possible, those who sent emails still considered this method of communication “futile and misleading.” Staff members reckoned the emails they sent “went into a big hole”, and did not have any bearing on the process .

The aforementioned study empirically substantiates Weick’s (1995) view that to reduce confusion stemming from ambiguity, face-to-face media, such as seminars or workshops etc., involving interested parties is required. When people are “unsure what questions to ask and whether there even exists a problem”, rich personal media to resolve confusion within a pertinent time interval are mechanisms that “enable debate, clarification, and enactment more than simply provide large amounts of data” (Daft & Lengel, 1986; in Weick, 1995, p.99).

3.6 Sensemaking view of conflict

Matland’s (1995) ambiguity-conflict model proposes that a decreasing conflict level will shift political implementation towards experimental or administrative implementation. Along a similar logic, top-down scholars, who view conflict as manipulable, suggest that decreasing policy conflict levels will move decision-making away from the bureaucratic political model towards a rational model. Bottom-up scholars disagree and take a position that a policy’s conflict level cannot be easily manipulated and is to be taken as a given in policy implementation. Many researchers define conflict as “perceived differences and opposition between individuals or groups about interests, beliefs, or values that matter to them” (Callister, 1995; Jehn, 1997; De Dreu et al., 1999; Wall & in Mikkelsen, 2012, p.47). While

Weick's work does not explicitly apply a sensemaking framework to handling conflict, the sensemaking framework provides us with the analytical tools to explore how conflict is socially constructed, pursued and manifested in actual organisational settings, where ever it occurs.

The sensemaking framework also provides us with alternative conceptual insights to transcend a view of conflict as part of "conflict-cooperation dichotomy, where one is defined in terms of the absence of the other" (Mikkelsen, 2012, p.15). Instead, attention is focused on how conflict plays out in group dynamics and organisational cultures, as an inherent part of the social interaction in the day-to-day life of an organisation. Hence, an approach that uses sensemaking lenses to examine conflict, looks less at attempts to lessen conflict along the high-low continuum, but rather more on understanding mechanisms by which organisations and actors enact and make sense of conflict. Mikkelsen (2012, p.12) invokes March and Simon (1958) to make the case that broadening our understanding of how conflict unfolds in an organisation will help organisational players act from a deeper knowledge base, beyond regarding conflict as a "breakdown in standard mechanisms of decision making"

A view of conflict as socially constructed focuses on how conflict is interpreted and acted out by disputants, and how such "interpretations shape, and were shaped by, practices of handling conflict" (Mikkelsen, 2012, p.50). These include paying attention to accounts, definitions and meaning given to conflict at different times in the organisational context in which the action is taking place. This implies that interpretation of problems and issues that give rise to conflict are investigated as occurrences that are part of daily work routines, and therefore rooted in 'normal' organisational activities. It is an approach that departs from the assumption that conflict is an exceptional case outside the usual daily business of organisational life, and to be treated in a special way.

A social construction approach also transcends the neat theoretical demarcation of conflict typology, which contends that most conflicts are an assortment of task-related encounters (e.g. work procedures, allocation of resources, etc.) and relationship skirmishes (e.g. clash of values, interpersonal tastes or styles). The core aim is to understand conflict so that organisational actors can be empowered to act from an informed knowledge base in dealing with conflict, as they effect social change. According to Bartunek et al. (1992), in essence, social context and social process are highlighted, because they are instrumental in shaping the form and path of conflict as "part of the social fabric of organisations" (in Mikkelsen, 2012, p.36).

Drawing on the viewpoint of conflict as a social or cultural phenomenon (Barley, 1991), the application of a sensemaking framework enables us to examine how organisational actors act out conflict, framing it in terms of a concrete set of circumstances, and seeing the extent to which cultural and social context influence how conflicts are framed and handled. In a conflict management empirical study in the British Police Force, Van Maanen (1992) aptly articulates the significance of meaning-making in conflict thus: “meaning is so critical because there is nothing inherent in the notion of conflict that is strictly independent of human observation and the making of meaning” (in Mikkelsen, 2012, p.36). Studies of conflict that view it as neutral focus on how actors understand conflict through meaning-making as a complex and dynamic process which is informed by their experiences, events and actions, which could also serve as guidance for further action.

As an outgrowth of Goffman’s (1974) theory of frame analysis, the sensemaking framework is most relevant in studying how organisational actors make sense of, and derive meaning from, day-to-day conflict that arises in routine organisational work;- instead of focusing only on conflict in extreme situations characterised by crises (in Mikkelsen, 2012). Frame analysis’ theoretical framework provides insights that have influenced sensemaking for studying how occurrences and events are defined through perceptual frameworks, when organisational actors make sense of actions and situations. According to Goffman (1974), frames “constitute a repertoire for interpretation for members of a community, and this repertoire reflects a central element of that particular community’s culture” (in Mikkelsen, 2012, p.36). This implies that the manner in which conflict is framed, how actors make sense of conflict, how they act out and address conflict, and how they interpret and influence other actors’ actions in conflict situations, must be understood within the wider social and institutional context in which the conflict happens.

From a sensemaking perspective, the process of organising experiences in a particular way, taken as what has transpired in a situation, is thus defined as framing and happens in hindsight, when actors bracket and label their experience and ascribe meaning to it (Weick, 1995). Equally, besides being concerned with how people interpret a conflict situation, sensemaking is also preoccupied with “how people enact the environment they interpret and constitute their identity within these enactments, shaping how they interpret events, things, phenomena” (Weick et al., 2005). If we are to manage conflict, being responsive to the actions of implementing agents is crucial in the creation and unravelling of conflict as a disruption. To the extent that conflicts are distinct interruptions in the ongoing flow of

organisational routines, they are occasions for sensemaking. Such disruption leads to varying and occasionally contrasting interpretation of events and occurrences that may reveal how intersubjective sensemaking gives rise to fluctuating degrees of distress in social interactions.

3.7 Sensemaking Model of Knowledge

Of all the variable clusters in the analytical literature on policy implementation, there is consensus on the importance of capacity as a requirement for effective implementation. Viewing organisations as knowledge systems, we can see how existing knowledge is drawn upon to generate new knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Spencer, 1996; Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001). There is general agreement in both the field of knowledge management and organisational theory scholarship that understanding the process of knowledge creation enables an organisation to optimise its resources and put on offer its best services and products. According to Mischen and Jackson (2008, p.315), the successful management of knowledge is critical for effective policy implementation. Contingent upon the mechanisms used and knowledge created, it is widely accepted that knowledge-based assets contribute significantly to enhanced organisational performance. However, there is still some theoretical confusion about the nature and the types of organisational knowledge that are instrumental in the continuing survival and growth of an organisation.

Prominent studies in knowledge management studies since at least Hayken (1945) have contributed significantly toward developing insights in the field (in Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001). Subsequently, several distinctions about different types of organisational knowledge have been introduced over the years. Scholars have come up with various definitions with regard to the basic characteristics of knowledge, how knowledge unfolds; and they have introduced numerous distinctions in relation to different kinds of organisational knowledge (e.g. Boulding, 1966; Polanyi, 1966; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Spender, 1996; Davenport et al., 1998; Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001). The literature reveals two distinct approaches at attempts to understand organisational knowledge. The first perspective focuses on the techniques, strategies, procedures, and routines, by which various kinds of knowledge are “created, codified, converted, transferred and exchanged” (e.g. Nelson & Winter, 1982; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Teece et al., 1997). The underlying theoretical assumption of this approach is that organisations possess different kinds of knowledge. The task therefore, is to identify and examine these different types of knowledge as a way to manage knowledge effectively in organisations.

The second perspective argues that knowledge is processes-driven, dispersed, and inherently indeterminate (e.g. Polanyi, 1996; Tsoukas, 1996, 2002; Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Polanyi (1996) builds on Hayken's (1945) suggestion that individuals possess certain types of knowledge that are not transferrable, to make the point that "all knowing is personal knowing – participation through indwelling" (Tsoukas, 2002, p.2). The assertion implies that there exists a crucial and individualised component to knowledge that is a structural element underpinning all other forms of knowledge. Polanyi calls this elementary aspect of knowledge 'tacit knowledge' and characterises it as knowledge that is essentially intuitive, inarticulable and "non-verbalisable." Echoing Polanyi's (1962, p.62) words, Tsoukas (2002, p.9) writes: "knowing something is a contextual issue and fundamentally connected to action... a structural change achieved by a repeated mental effort aiming at the instrumentalisation of certain things and actions in the service of some purpose." Put differently, through unconditional or uncritical commitment, and repeated practice, an individual acquires tacit or practical knowledge by assimilating (interiorise or dwell in) the hidden rules (inarticulable or 'logically unspecifiable') involved in a series of events or actions to accomplish an objective, in a particular context.

While the importance of tacit knowledge regarding effective organisational performance is widely acknowledged by organisational theorists, it is conceptualised and interpreted inconsistently by knowledge management researchers. Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) idea that the generation of organisational knowledge is primarily driven by converting the tacit dimension of knowledge to an explicit form (or vice-versa) has been extensively adopted by many researchers (e.g. Biosot, 1995; Spender, 1996, 1998; Davenport & Prusak; 1998; Abmronis & Bowman, 2001). There are, however, counterviews to the postulation that the merit of tacit knowledge is found only in being 'captured', 'translated', or 'converted' (Cook & Brown, 1999; Kreiner, 1999; Brown & Duguid, 2000; Tsoukas & Vladimirour, 2001; Tsouka, 2002).

According to Tsoukas (2002, p.1), tacit knowledge has been "greatly misunderstood" in organisational theory, and the notion that it is knowledge-not-yet articulated is erroneous and at variance with Polanyi's conceptualisation. To dispute attempts to "reduce practical knowledge to technical knowledge", Tsoukas (2002, p.13) draws forth from Polanyi's (1962) pioneering work to illustrate the fundamental and structural difference between practice (tacit knowledge) and rules (explicit knowledge) thus: "rules of art can be useful, but they do not determine the practice of the art; they are maxims, which can serve as a guide to an art only if

they can be integrated into the practical knowledge of the art. They cannot replace that knowledge.” This artistic metaphor seeks to convey that the content of knowledge is acquired through practical experience or learning by example, which is quantitatively different from the content of knowledge that can be articulated and formulated in rules or propositions.

Polanyi understands practical or tacit knowledge as “skilful knowing [that] contains an ineffable element; it is based on an act of personal insight that is essentially inarticulable” (Tsoukas, 2002, p.16). It is knowledge that may not be “captured”, “translated” or “converted” *in toto*, but is reified in our actions. Distinctively, explicit knowledge is but only the description of the technical parts: “that which is possible to articulate in rules, principles, and maxims... that is, in propositions” Tsoukas (2002, p.14). In this context, an explicit understanding is created when we reflect on the practical activities we are engaged in, and we re-punctuate the distinctions underlying those activities, to grasp the linkages among items not previously thought interrelated. From this perspective, Tsoukas (2002, p.15) submits that tacit and explicit knowledge should not be perceived as “two ends of a continuum but the two sides of the same coin.”

Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001, p.976) provide a congenial definition of knowledge, that is particularly purposeful for this thesis: “knowledge is the capability members of an organisation have developed to draw distinction in the process of carrying out their work, in particular concrete context, by enacting sets of generalisation whose application depends on historically evolved collective understanding.” This definition brings together crucial elements of knowledge management, sensemaking and institutionalism that are central to our exploration of the implementation process.

The “capability to draw distinction in the process of carrying out work” depends on the ability of actors to exercise judgement when they split the implementation process into constituent “parts.” That is, actors bring into consciousness certain aspects of the process for closer examination and enactment through isolating, bracketing, noticing, labelling, and ascribing significance based on their experiences - including, of course, own behaviour. The location of organisational actors “in a particular concrete context” and “enacting sets of generalisations” refer to collectively generated and sustained domains of action within which policy meanings are constructed or particular criteria for the evaluation of implementation successes or failures hold. In addition, attempts to act and understand are synchronically orientated, enabled and constrained by past and current positions occupied by actors and the cultural tools they employ. Lastly, “historically evolved collective understanding” attests to

the social and retrospective nature of sensemaking which involves reaching into the past to draw out from history sensible patterns of interpretation to be superimposed on current events and actions.

The purpose of this section is to explore the interplay between individual actors' knowledge, organisational knowledge, cultural knowledge, and the actions organisational actors undertake in the organised contexts of policy implementation. Thus, out of the several proposed taxonomies of knowledge in the literature, this thesis draws on insights from Cecez-Kecmanovic et al.'s (2002) *sensemaking model of knowledge* that view knowledge as "both a subject and a product of sensemaking by individuals, groups and organisations" (p.92). Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. (2002, p.221) adopt Tsoukas' (1996) conception of organisations as knowledge systems: "firms are inherently decentred systems and that the knowledge they need to draw upon is indeterminate and emerging, and cannot be known by a single mind." However, the theoretical underpinning of Cecez-Kecmanovic et al.'s model takes a different approach in that it is well-grounded in the sensemaking outlook on knowledge in an organisational context.

From a sensemaking perspective, knowledge is inter-subjectively created, collectively shared, disseminated and acquired through numerous social encounters, in addition to the cognitive dimension. Inspired and informed by Weick (1995), a knowledge model based on a sensemaking framework addresses questions about the inherent features of knowledge that implementation agencies need to make an effort to manage and what such 'managing knowledge' means. The focus is on how implementation agencies can make a difference to performance and provide distinctive services by drawing on existent knowledge to generate capacity, produce new knowledge, and invent new ways to deploy and utilise resources.

To help us understand what it actually means to manage knowledge, the sensemaking model of knowledge takes as a point of departure the four levels of sensemaking processes in organisations by exploring the nature of knowledge at each level, and how knowledge is produced, used and maintained. The model identifies four different dimensions of knowledge at individual, collective, organisation and cultural levels. The four types of knowledge are neither hierarchical nor exclusive, instead, they are intertwined in a way that there is continuous interplay among them, such that they continuously constitute and influence each other. Cecez-Kecmanovic and colleagues (2002, 2003) build on Weick's (1995) articulation of the four levels of sensemaking processes that are deemed germane for the exploration of the basic characteristics of organisational knowledge. Weick (1995, p.70) elaborates on these

processes by proceeding from Wiley's (1988) contention that "there are three levels of sensemaking 'above' the individual level of analysis."

First, at individual or intra-subjective level, an organisational actor makes sense of tasks and occurrences, his/her environment, role and more generally of organisational processes, procedures and events. Through personal experience, which is underpinned by values, beliefs, assumptions, skills, etc., and reflects current and past socialisation, an actor utilises, revisits and recreates, updates or acquires personal knowledge in the process of being involved in organisational processes. Second, organisational actors interact, formally or casually, to deal with issues and problems, share assumptions and experiences, and together create intersubjective meanings. Key elements of this collective sensemaking process are the sharing of knowledge, co-creating knowledge, realising mutual understanding, as problematic issues are bracketed, labelled and framed to allow intelligible action (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2002).

Wieck and Roberts (1993) refer to a "collective mind" as the capability of a group of individuals to work together, to embark on coordinated action, and complete intricate tasks jointly that a single individual could not accomplish. Collective knowing or intersubjective knowing, then, akin to the notion of a collective mind, transcends individual knowledge in that it is not ensconced in an individual, but assembled in the cognitive schemes that reside among individuals. Inter-subjective knowledge, therefore, arises from "a collective sensemaking process in which participants interrelate heedfully..." (Weick & Roberts, 1993). This means that intersubjective meaning-making, knowledge co-creation, as well as action that is taken, are enmeshed in social interaction and each action is altered by the one preceding it. Weick (1995, p.71) contends that during this process, "individual thoughts, feelings, and intentions are merged or synthesised" in such a way that "the self gets transformed from 'I' into 'we'." He goes further to argue that this transformation is more than an interaction in which norms are shared; it is a "connection through social structure" that gives rise to an emergent "social reality" in which interactions are synthesised into a collective consciousness (p.71)

Third, sensemaking processes above the level of social interaction involve the creation and conservation of meanings attributed to normative expectations, such as ideas about the structure of the organisation, rules, norms, roles, social networks, policies, and scripts of patterns of interactions that specify due process, legitimacy, authority, etc.. At this level of sensemaking, called generic subjectivity, organisational actors share and accept a common

way of doing things and looking at occurrences and events in an organisation, without them having participated in the creation of such meanings. Explicitly, Wiley (1988) articulates relegation of the individual from intersubjective to generic subjective thus: “concrete human beings, subjects, are no longer present. Selves are left behind at the interactive level. Social structure implies a generic self, an interchangeable part – as filler of roles and follower of rules – but not concrete, individualised selves.” (in Weick, 1995, p.71).

According to Weick, it is from this ongoing transition of intersubjective meaning to generic meaning, that generic knowledge is created. Weick (1995, p.71) refers to organisational knowledge as the “mainstay of organisational analysis”, and Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) characterise knowledge at this level as “organisational knowledge in a strong sense.” It is knowledge that encompasses social structures and shared generic meanings that are diffused by organisational actors, regardless of them having taken part in its formation. When organisational actors put into practice organisational knowledge in their daily activities, they in turn re-create, reproduce and potentially alter their own knowledge (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2002). Organisational knowledge tends to persevere and deter change; thus, it promotes interdependence, imposes control and enables stability. In contrast, intersubjective meaning-making emboldens independence and change; hence, it is a foundation of innovation and creativity.

Fourth, underpinning the three sensemaking processes explained above are institutional features such norms, rituals, customs, habitual behaviour, myths, metaphors, and other language forms, etc., that are generally known as ‘culture’. Weick refers to Wiley’s (1988) final level of analysis in *semiotic theory of self*, culture, as ‘extra-subjective’. This level of sensemaking is conceptualised as the realm of abstract “symbolic reality” that serves as “a reservoir of background knowledge”, enabling or impeding meaning-making at the other three sensemaking processes (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2002, p.100). Knowledge embedded in culture can assume tacit or explicit dimensions. As tacit knowledge, it is cultural knowledge that individuals are typically oblivious to. It includes “taken-for-granted convictions, beliefs, assumptions, values and experiences that members of an organisation draw upon in order to make sense of a situation and actions” (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2003, p.221). As explicit knowledge, it is knowledge whose elements can be articulated, contested and justified; thus becoming part of recreated knowledge emergent from discursive and interpretive achievement of organisational players across all levels of sensemaking.

A sensemaking view of knowledge allow us to highlight the nature of knowledge dynamics in organisations by making a distinction between different types as it is created and recreated at different levels of sensemaking. Additionally, it is equally significant to examine the pressures between the levels, and how each level continuously constitutes and impacts on the other. Applying the sensemaking model of knowledge to the implementation process can enable us to identify a specific view of knowledge prevalent and emerging at different sensemaking levels: from a micro-level actor to a culture, as well as the pressures between the levels. This will in turn assist us to improve our comprehension of the process of knowledge creation and factors the prevent knowledge sharing.

The explanatory power and the utility of the model are demonstrated in the analysis of complex knowledge management phenomena in two major empirical studies (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2002; Jerram et al., 2002). These studies found that the interface, or levels of tensions, between organisational knowledge at the social structural level and collective knowledge at intersubjective meaning making level, is a function of the degree of stability and uncertainty within which an organisation operates. As an example, in times of certainty and stability, organisational knowledge endures and is not usually challenged by the collective knowledge that is being continuously created by inter-subjective meanings. However, in times of uncertainty or instability, the established way of doing things, based on commonly understood norms, values and scripts for action, is disturbed, leading to added uncertainty, as the validity and legitimacy of social structures are eroded. This then necessitates the need to construct different generic meanings and legitimate new organisational knowledge and social structures.

According to Cecez-Kecmanovic (2003, p.222), the foregoing example illustrates a “knowledge management problem par excellence, albeit not recognised as such in practice.” Top-down implementation approaches are pinpointed as particularly contentious “when actors in power positions exercise undue influence on meaning making and control over knowledge creation, thus disabling or diminishing influences from broad social-interaction processes of its members” (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2003, p.222). Authority-based organisational knowledge results in increased tension and uncertainty potentially leading to conflict that ultimately undermines the emergence of generic knowledge from an ongoing transition of intersubjective meanings to generic meanings.

No matter how well-intentioned, considering social structure as the nerve centre of all meaning making, regardless of the inputs of micro-level actors, results in a situation where

participation in democratising decision-making cannot be accomplished. Weick (1995, p.73) views the inherent conflictual engagement between collective knowledge and organisational knowledge as the essence of organising: “thus organisational forms are the bridging operations that link the intersubjective with the generically intersubjective” (Ceccez-Kecmanovic et al., 2002.) According to Tsoukas (1996, p.13), organisations are “distributed knowledge systems in a strong sense: they are de-centred systems.” To make a case against the idea of “master control room” where knowledge may be centrally managed, he sagely writes: “the key to achieving coordinated action does not depend on those ‘higher up’ collecting more and more knowledge, as on those ‘lower down’ finding more ways of getting connected and interrelating knowledge each one has” (p.22).

Analysis that is informed by the sensemaking model attests to the fact that even in a relatively stable environment, intersubjective meaning spawns creativity and innovation (Ceccez-Kecmanovic, 2002). This suggests that the likelihood of the emergence of novel practices and new knowledge is not in the least bit entirely exhausted in the continuous flux of organisational life. The creation of new knowledge gives rise to “new capabilities and innovations that enhance existing competencies or build new ones, generate new services, products, or processes; or expand the repertory of viable organisational responses” (Choo, 2002, p.86). While new knowledge and capabilities widen a range of alternatives for organisational responses and allows new forms of actions, they also introduce risks and bring new forms of uncertainty, as new capabilities and innovations are yet untested. Because organisations themselves have institutional characteristics (enabling and restricting elements), the risks and benefits of novel capabilities and organisational responses are structured by “choice behaviours through roles and scripts, rules and routines, the organisation simplifies decision making, codifies and transmits past learning, and proclaim competence and accountability” (Choo, 2002, p.87).

There are other important supplementary knowledge management activities besides knowledge creation, capturing/articulating, and sharing/transferring that are not sufficiently explained in the sensemaking model, but that also contribute to the development of organisational knowledge and the accumulation of the repository of knowledge-based resources in an organisation over time. These include knowledge acquisition (from external sources) and other knowledge management activities that entail manipulating created or acquired knowledge, such as knowledge assembly, integration, leverage, and exploitation. Knowledge assembly refers to the deliberate task of identifying and activating knowledge

created in different organisational units that would be “necessary for developing and delivering a new product, service or developing an organisational capacity” (Nielsen, 2006, p.64).

Knowledge integration occurs when knowledge that has been assembled from different organisations units is assimilated, adapted and internalised by the receiving unit (Nielsen, 2006). The process of combining and relating assembled knowledge resources to function together is essential for the development of new organisational capabilities and competencies (integrated resources) that form the basis for enhancing organisational performance (Grant, 1996; Teece et al., 1997). The integrated knowledge-based resource is leveraged by searching for new ways to exploit the organisational capabilities it generates as a source of innovation and competitive advantage. According to the knowledge-based theory, knowledge contribution to the value added and strategic importance, with respect to the survival and growth, of a firm does not only rest with its ability to create new knowledge, but in the ability to apply and exploit knowledge (Grant, 1996). Furthermore, the use of knowledge in dealing with cues from the environment, or organisational processes, will produce experiences that result in the creation of new knowledge.

The next chapter will connect knowledge management activities described in this section with insights from dynamic capabilities perspectives to expand on the resource-based view of the capacity variable. Teece et al., (1997, p.516) describes dynamic capabilities as the ability to alter resources through organisational and strategic routines in order to “integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environment.”

To come full circle, the burden exists to address the broader cultural, economic, political, and social processes that may influence the actions of implementation agencies and agents. Such a theoretical effort would benefit from combining sensemaking concepts with elements from institutional theory, especially Giddens (1981) and Powell and DiMaggio’s (1991) sociological institutionalism. According to Webber and Glynn (2006, p.1640), “the limited role of institutional ideas in actual sensemaking research stems in part from scholarly division of labour: work drawing on institutionalism has focused primarily on extra-subjective macro-level structures, while sensemaking research has emphasised local and subjective micro-level processes.” The two frameworks will be integrated in the ensuing section to enlarge the notion that institutions, as the realm of abstract symbolic reality, are based on typifications and abstractions. The aim is explore how conceptual bridges can be built between the social

interaction of implementing agents (micro-level), implementing agencies (meso-level), and the larger social systems (macro-level).

3.8 Institutional Context and Action

Referring to a widely held critique that Weick (1995) under-theorises the role of the broader social and institutional context, Webber and Glynn (2006, p.1639) write that organisational sensemaking “appears to neglect, or at least lacks an explicit account of the embeddedness of sensemaking in social space and time.” They see a “scholarly division of labour” between institutionalism’s primary emphasis on macro-level structures (extra-subjective level) and sensemaking’s focus on micro-level processes (intersubjective level). This research adopts a view of context that seeks to expand the traditional view of institutions as cultural cognitive constraints by suggesting that institutions are both enabling and constraining as the setting that prompts, guides, primes or orients, and edits our sensemaking (Webber & Glynn, 2006, Cardinale, 2018).

To highlight the criticality of institutional context, many scholars in implementation literature have pointed out that implementation agents and top levels actors are always ensconced in the “larger societal systems” that “structure the perceptions, resources, and participations of those actors” (Sabatier, 1986, p.35). Echoing comparable sentiments, Berman (1978, p.25) argues that the “political, social, and economic conditions of the local environment,” which are also “embedded in a larger environment (e.g., general social and economic conditions),” determines the manner in which policies are implemented by players at local level. Extending the influence of institutional context beyond individuals to organisations, Scot and Meyer (1991) refer to the broader cultural environment as “generalised belief systems that define how specific types of organisations are to conduct themselves” (in Rice, 2012, p.1052).

Proposing a micro-institutionalist theory of policy implementation, Rice (2012, p1043) marries Lipsky’s (1980) institutional theory with a street-level bureaucracy outlook to make a point that the implementation of service delivery programs is “real” only to extent that it is “re(enacted) and re(negotiated) in the interaction between implementing agents and clients.” To illustrate, despite the fact that the ingredients of any municipal service delivery program are to be found in official documents, administration of the programs, allocation of resources and execution of tasks becomes real, once actors start acting upon the requirements of the program. Thus, according to micro-institutionalism, social policies “exist in their instantiation in social systems” only when they meet the needs of target groups (Giddens, 1981, in Rice,

2012, p.1043). This is also a moment when policy begins to unfold and perhaps transform itself, because implementation agents and clients and coalitions have the ability to autonomously enact an institution.

The foregoing perspectives draw on institutional theory and focus mostly on macro-level or extra-subjective structures. Emphasis is placed on the role of institutions as “internalised cognitive constraints.” Webber and Glynn (2006, p.1640) describe internalised cognitive constraints as “taken for granted ways of thinking... [that] make alternatives unimaginable or implausible so that action that is in line with institutions follows automatically.” As an example, institutionalised roles and scripts for action that people have internalised through socialisation (e.g. jobs, school system, media, etc.) become embodied in actors as dispositions that are assumed. Without refuting that institutions have a hand in it, it is a frequently heard view that is somewhat limited in scope and is only a part of the story.

Although institutions set bounds on rationality by enabling and constraining decision-making as regards the probability of certain kinds of choices and actions, it is not disputable that individuals and organisations can deliberately transform, and even eradicate, institutions (Giddens, 1981; Barley & Tolbert, 1997). According to Rice (2012, p.1041), a micro-institutionalist view is that “all social reality begins with individual human action.” Micro-institutionalists argue that “institutions” emerge from “aggregated and increasingly standardised interactions” of the majority of members of society giving rise to ideas about the world that constitute part of the larger cultural, political, social, and economic systemic landscapes (Rice, 2012, p.1041). However, while institutions have a bearing on what we do, they do not exclusively dictate our actions. Rice, (2012, p.1042) argues that individual action may induce institutional transformation that subsequently transforms the meaning or latitude of an institution, and accordingly also the broader systemic landscape of which that institution is a part.

Giddens’s (1981) work on the “theory of structuration” makes an effort to articulate a process theory of societal structure (institution) as both the restraint and outcome of human action. He insists that structures must be considered as “dual.” This implies that structures are “both the medium and the outcome of the practices which constitute social systems” (Giddens, 1981; in Sewell, 1992, p.4). According to Sewell (1992, p.4), through principles that pattern social practices and the mechanisms that cause them, “structures not only shape people’s practices, but it is also people’s practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures.” In this sense, social structures are seen as comprising either “recurrent patterns of interaction” or the

mechanisms that produce such patterns (Cardinale, 2018, p.134). After a prolonged period of oscillating between competing positions on the primacy of structures and primacy of agency, Giddens' conceptualisation of structure is widely adopted across institutional theory (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Battilana et al., 2012; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Meyer, 2008; Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Scott, 2013; Thornton, 2012; in Cardinale, 2018, p.133).

Institutions are understood to be forms of social structure in which mechanisms that “make reproduction” of social patterns do not require “recurrent collective mobilisation” in order to be reproduced; that is, they have achieved a state of “institutionalisation” (Jepperson, 1991; Scott, 2013; in Cardinale, 2018, p.134). Barley and Tolbert (1997, p.101) use the terms institutionalisation and structuration “synonymously.” More specific definitions tend to be adopted depending on whether the focus is on how actors engage with structure, based on social positions, in which they are embedded, irrespective of whether (or to what extent) it is institutionalised. According to Barley and Tolbert (1997, p.98) institutions have different normative power and effects on behaviour and organisational practices, depending “in part, on how long an institution has existed and on how widely and deeply it is accepted by actors of a group.” As an example, institutions that have been in existence over a significant timespan and have gained endorsement are less susceptible to challenges and more likely to influence action than those with a relatively shorter history.

The nature of the relationship between everyday organisational activities and institutions is delineated more explicitly by employing a conception of institution that is applicable at different levels of analysis. The assumption this approach makes about identifying applicable social players who constitute the environment of an organisation, such as individuals, groups, or even broader society, is not exclusive. A simplified but fundamental conceptual scheme about the levels of social reality reveals a systematic structural pattern of embedding, with individuals' interaction being embedded in groups (micro-level structure), with groups nested in organisations (meso-level structure), with organisations being entrenched in communities or a system of communities, and organisations and communities within societal systems or institutional domains (macro-level structure) (Abrutyn & Turner, 2011, p.285).

The institutional environment of implementing agencies can therefore be systematised into (a) local, regional or districts, provincial, and national level, and (b) into institutional domains such as social, cultural, political and economic spheres. Within each institutional domain there are generalised symbolic media shared and exchanged among actors within diverse institutional domains. These symbolic media of exchange are viewed as symbolic “bundles”

facilitating yet constraining action and interaction by providing a means for constructing themes of discourse and, ultimately, for the development of ideologies and evaluative beliefs of a domain (Luhman, 1984; in Abrutyn & Turner, 2011, p.286). This implies that interaction between implementing agents and client and coalitions is influenced and shaped by all these levels and spheres because all parties “involved in the interaction are directly embedded in these systems as individuals and because the implementing organisation is embedded in these systems as a meso-system and institution” (Rice, 2012, p.1053)

Similar to Wieck’s (1995, p.109) notion of “minimal sensible structures”, actors at micro-level and meso-level agencies actors rely on symbolic media of exchange as the building blocks of the environments “to construct roles and interpret objects” and events. To elaborate, symbolic media of exchange corresponds with basic propositions in system theory, in which culture is viewed as ideologies, or cognitive systems, that shape how individuals and groups interpret objects and their place among other people (e.g. membership in terms of gender, ethnicity, or religion) and act in a surrounding based on moral assessment; social sphere is viewed as binding people together in a collective of human relations such as nations, organisations, kinship or friendship; politics are viewed as a system of making laws and regulations based on contentions in which ideas and vision of the dominant group tend to prevail; and the economy is viewed as a system in which the exchange of services and goods determine class divisions within society, thereby the standard and quality of lives.

Action within institutions has been the central theme of institutional theories from the onset (Parsons, 1937; Selznick, 1949; in Barley & Tolbert, 1997). The view of earlier work in institutional theory is that organisational actors are strategic, in that they evaluate and choose means in view of ends, but their ability to autonomously adjust means and ends is constrained by individual factors (actors develop views and habits), organisational factors (organisational goals and procedures achieve an established value-laden status), and societal factors (members of society act in ways consistent with the on-going social structure and cultural patterns). This approach came under criticism for relying on a means-ends framework, influenced by Parson’s (1937) theory of action, in which action “remains rational in the sense that it comprises the quasi-intentional pursuit of gratification by reasoning humans who balance complex and multifaceted evaluative criteria” (DiMaggio & Powel, 1991; in Cardinale, 2018, p.137).

New intuitionism shifts the focus from reflective and explicit evaluation of means and ends to highlight the different kind of constraint on action. It is based on cognitive schemes and

taken-for-granted understandings that organisational actors share, which conceal possibilities for action outside those understandings. Many strands of this approach seek to portray actors as relatively autonomous from institutions by striving to reconcile the embeddedness of actors in institutions with their ability to be reflective and change (or maintain) institutions. The key limitation, however, is that it is under-theorised and typically left unclear whether, when choosing among the repertoire of actions enabled by structure, actors are still influenced by institutions or they act in a fully reflective fashion. In other words, new institutional theory does not make explicit the distinction between how structures create possibilities for actions (enabling) and the mechanisms by which they orient actors towards some course of action over others (guiding).

To understand fully the process by which actions and institutions are interchangeably related requires us to draw on work from social theory that does not specifically refer to institutions, but rather to social structure. Building on Jepperson (1991) and Scott's (2013) work, Cardinale (2018, p.134) defines social structure as either "relatively regular patterns of social action or the mechanism that produce such patterns ... which give stability and meaning to social life." While the mechanisms and patterns tend to differ broadly in the literature, varying emphasis refers to social position (Bourdieu, 1990; in Sewell, 1992), or sometimes to a combination of rules and resources (Giddens, 1984). Institutions, in this sense, are usually understood as forms of social structures that have achieved the state of 'institutionalisation', that is, the mechanism that reproduces them has reached a state of being relatively automatic. In order to focus on social structure more generally, rather than on institutions specifically, we draw on social theory to help us examine how actors engage with structures in which they are embedded, regardless of whether they are institutionalised.

Responding to a call by DiMaggio and Powel (1991) for a theory of action that provides explicit micro-foundations for new institutionalism, Cardinale (2018) proposes a perspective for institutional theory that offers a route to reconcile insights from old and new institutional theory by unpacking and bringing together mechanisms of embeddedness implicit to both approaches that have long been seen as conflicting. The crucial contribution of these micro foundations is to propose a solution to the "paradox of embedded agency." That is, to show how action by organisational actors within institutions can be reflective and relatively autonomous from the environment, and yet be influenced by structure. Cardinale's approach builds on the work of other institutional theorists (Selznik, 1949; Giddens, 1981; Bourdieu, 1990), which emphasises the connection between the past and present social positions of

actors and their identities, and adopts a view of social structure that emphasises social position.

According to Cardinale, actors develop structures of cognition and action (Bourdieu's habitus) that reflect their social position, expressing themselves by acting according to the expectations attached to the position they occupy; and so develop the manner and propensity to act appropriately in those circumstances (p.140). Since these positions are associated with rights and responsibilities, it means that whatever the current position is that they occupy, that will influence the possibilities the actors have at their disposal, which, in turn, informs means and ends. Structure shapes their environment by creating possibilities (the ends), but only affects the actors by providing them the means (in the form of toolkits for action). In this context, structure does not enter into the picture for the actors; that is to say, it does not modify them in any systematic or fundamental way.

An actor's history of assuming several positions across his/her lifetime implies that the actor has been modified by the structure in some systematic way, according to the acquired dispositions resonating with the positions occupied over time. In this sense, by imprinting dispositions, though updated by new experience, structure creates a propensity favouring some actions over others. Thus, the current environment's shaping of means and ends - which are reflectively evaluated within the means-ends framework, and the propensity towards self-evident possibilities, which results from the transposition of schemes from past experience to the current situation - account for both mechanisms of embeddedness (Cardinale, 2018, p.143).

The foregoing discussion suggests that the narrowing down of possibilities enabled by structure to one course action (orienting) depends on the encounter between the actors' current position (environment) and habitus, which is shaped by and reflects each actor's history in terms of social positioning. This means that winnowing to one course of action depends partly on the evaluation of means in view of ends and partly on the fact that some possibilities present themselves as self-evident. The consequent action, according Cardinale (2018, p.146), "is not deterministic but expresses a creating of mobilisation of past experience to address unfolding circumstances." Different actors in the same position might orient themselves toward different possibilities, because they do not have the same history of class positioning. This argument attributes an effect to structure: the imprinting of disposition that orient actors towards some possibilities rather than other, which is at least under-theorised in terms of viewing structures as determinants of possibility. Actions, then, result

from how actors engage according to their social positions and habitus (Cardinale, 2018, p.145).

The review of institutional ideas in this section lays the groundwork for exploring the intricate interconnection between micro-institutionalism and sensemaking as dynamic and ongoing processes. The two frameworks are greatly oriented towards the relationship between meaning and action. According to Weick (1995, p.53), social context is critical for sensemaking because “it binds people to actions that they must justify, it affects the saliency of information, and it provides norms and expectations that constrain explanations.” This implies that sensemaking, like other aspects of organisational life, cannot be fully understood apart from its broader institutional and social context. The next chapter will elaborate on how Weber and Glynn (2006) extend theorisation of the role of wider social, historical or institutional context by linking ideas about sensemaking with those of institutional theory. Additionally, an analysis of the interaction among institutional context and other implementation variables will draw on Webber and Glynn’s view of how institutions surface in sensemaking.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter shows three ways in which we can employ sensemaking concepts to bring to the fore the underlying micro dynamics of policy implementation. First, using sensemaking conceptual lenses to look at implementation activities broadens and deepens our understanding of: (a) how the implementation environment provides the infrastructure from within which cues are extracted and interpreted, and how action repertoires, not mere planning and deliberations, affect what can be known about the implementation environment; (b) policy reformulation or adaption includes noticing, bracketing, labelling and plausible construction of cues that are interpreted, as well as the revision of those interpretation based on implementation activities and their consequences; (c) patterns of interaction and interrelationships among actors who participate in designing, interpreting, translating and executing action policy and the rationale behind them; and (d) reading of the ‘same’ event of projects at the top and bottom differ dramatically.

Second, sensemaking enables us to reason in ways that differs from decision rationality and rational practices found in conventional models of policy implementation. Whereas implementation literature recognises ambiguity, uncertainty and conflict as inherent to implementation processes, the mechanisms that are proposed to mediate these, such as

steering political implementation to administrative implementation (Matland, 1995), are not sufficiently sophisticated to deal with the less obvious, but nevertheless undeniable needs of the actors, when overwhelmed by equivocality and conflict. Other properties deemed crucial to perceptions by actors are information load, complexity and turbulence, and the processes and structures of the implementing agencies. Instead of denouncing the street-level bureaucrats' presumed subversive disposition, it is important to enlighten actors of their need for values, priorities, and clarity about preferences to help them be clear about which projects matter. By adopting this approach, the disposition and attention of all the actors will be turned on to what is happening - the gap between policy intentions and outcomes - and be able to pursue it in the midst of ambiguity, uncertainty and conflict. Sensemaking provides viable mechanisms to understand the process by which the dynamics of conflict manifest, and also describes how conflict is recognised and interpreted collectively in organisations.

Third, the sensemaking model of knowledge describes the four dimensions of knowledge distribution in an organisation: individual knowledge, collective knowledge of groups, organisational knowledge and knowledge entrenched in culture. To unravel the nature of knowledge and how its transformation impacts on organisational performance and outcomes, the model presents a framework that articulates the cause of actions by which knowledge is created, transmitted and maintained, how knowledge in organisations is continually re-constituted as well as the dynamic exchange between various types of knowledge. The model links individuals' intersubjective meaning making with emergent collective knowledge, which facilitates coordinated and consistent actions and enriches the conception of an organisation as a "distributed knowledge system... which is not, and cannot be, known in its totality by a single mind" (Tsoukas, 1996, p.22).

However, the sensemaking view of knowledge neither theorises nor elaborates on processes and mechanisms by which institutional context, at extra-subjective level, is intricately and recursively linked to action and sensemaking. Social mechanisms by which institutional context prime, edit and trigger sensemaking and Cardinale's (2018) model reconcile the conflict between the older institutional theory's means-ends framework and micro-foundations of new institutional theory, and allow us to build bridges across macro and micro level of social analysis.

Chapter 4

Analysis

4.1 Introduction

Lack of an agreement on an overarching theoretical framework in studies of implementation is alluded to in the second chapter and finds expression in the choice of and emphasis on certain variables. A phenomenon in which literature identifies more than three hundred critical variables clearly does not require additional variables. Instead, it necessitates efforts to develop structures of analysis based on empirically and theoretically grounded frameworks. Drawing on divergent perspectives from implementation studies, Najam's (1995) conceptual model seeks to provide such a structure. Accepting that implementation is an inherently complex process, the model groups and connects five cluster variables identified variously in the implementation literature to reveal insights about the nature and processes of policy implementation.

A review of implementation literature serves an important function of identifying prominent perspectives on policy implementation and critical variable affecting the process. According to O'Toole (1986), such reviews are also restricted in that they fall through in developing "integrative models." Both the '5Cs' Protocol and ambiguity-conflict models fall into this category because they do not sufficiently deal with organisational social dynamics which underpin theoretical frameworks for understanding strategic choices and approaches associated with the implementation process. Rather, the models are descriptive frameworks that nonetheless form the basis for developing an analytical framework. Building on these implementation models, an integrative framework adopted here, including sensemaking analysis of the five critical variables and their interface, aimed at making transparent underlying dimensions, interlocking routines, and patterns of actions attendant to a set of constructs of experiences and interpretations of implementation activities.

This chapter is not intended to pursue a comprehensive analysis of policy implementation concepts; instead it explores a seldom examined dimension of the implementation process, namely the sensemaking of key implementation actors. The result provides a sensemaking perspective on crucial aspects of implementation by linking them to events and actions beyond what is usually attributed to them in the implementation literature. This will be achieved by embedding an analysis of the variables in the implementing agents' interactions and implementing agencies' social dynamics amid a larger social structure. Najam's (1995)

‘5Cs’ protocol model provides the critical variables of implementation that this chapter will use to highlight the iterative movement between macro-, meso- and micro-level sensemaking of actors and other stakeholders.

To understand the dynamics of the factors contributing to effective implementation, it is vital that the linkages between framing of meanings at distinct organisational levels are interrogated. Although both actors at the top and lower level are ostensibly involved in implementing government policy, shifting emphasis in the literature betrays a rather contradictory understanding of the interconnection between them, which is suggestive of Weick’s “loosely coupled systems.” In spite of the fact that certain framings of meaning are axiomatically situated at distinct levels, in many cases of policy of implementation, upper spheres of government framing straddle across micro- and meso-levels. While operating mainly at a local level, implementing agencies borrow and exhibit some, but not all, of the arrays of meanings adduced by upper level framing. Therefore, the disconnection and transformation of meaning do occur. The disjuncture between frames becomes far greater when macro framing is compared with the definitional reality of local actors.

There is a policy implementation tension evident in many studies of policy process between the legitimacy of policymakers and the autonomy of the implementing actors. If effective implementation is measured by compliance with macro-level framing, then the extent to which micro-level practices can change during implementation becomes particularly problematic. Sensemaking furnishes us with the conceptual tools to untangle the process by which such change occurs by paying attention to the ways implementation agents interpret and understand the demand placed on them. Based on what Spillane (2002, p.388) calls “the interplay between policies that attempt to direct local action and the ways in which that discretion is constructed by locals”, sensemaking and sensegiving concepts reveal how discretion of micro-level actors is imbued with policy content.

Another aspect that can assist us in understanding the variations in implementation activities at different sites is the exploration of the context where implementation takes place (Mikkelsen (2012, p.116). Implementation literature tends to treat the broader institutional context as a background assumption of a more historical and cultural character. In contrast, enactment components of sensemaking accentuate the role of individuals and groups in creating and maintaining social context through enactment. Since this thesis is interested in understanding enacted sensemaking in the implementation processes, background factors and

organisational rules, as rules of behaviour that influence sensemaking, are moved to the forefront.

The anchor theorising in this chapter, ideas and examples will be drawn from institutions central to the implementation process of service delivery policies. These will include key institutional actors influencing and being influenced by the process, and the accompanying power and interest dynamics in the web of inter- and intra-agency relationships, and institutional characteristics coloured by the structure of the social, economic, political and legal spheres of their operation.

The three levels of government in South Africa will be used as exemplars of institutional structures located variously at different levels: municipal or local, provincial and national government. These institutional structures are simply three of a potentially expandable list of frames in the service delivery environment. Policy aimed at changing the lives of target communities such as service delivery policies are located in large-scale political programmes, aiming to broaden access to a variety of public services, especially where previously there were few services or no services at all. These policies illustrate how policy and implementation co-evolve during rounds of service delivery initiatives.

4.2 Implementation Activities and Sensemaking

Normative conversation and research point to a rather excessive inclination for planning and understanding prior to commencing implementation activities. The question that arises, though, is how could organisational actors' participation in planning facilitate sensemaking in such way that it leads to a less disjointed account and greater collective action? Extensive participation by multiple actors at different levels is likely to affect implementation adversely, for there is the potential that a diverse range of views will arise when interpreting various aspects of the policy.

Translating strategic policy goals into effective implementation is not necessarily going to be an uncontested terrain, but be subject to competing interpretations. The extent to which policy goals are to be realised therefore requires some measure of correlation between policy intention and their translation into operational practice. This effort involve active authoring of events and frameworks for understanding policy, as implementation actors are instrumental in constructing the very situation they are trying to make sense of (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking process provides viable mechanism to examine how grassroots actors influence policy translation, adaptation and their own behaviour. According to Weick (1995),

sensemaking phenomenon is about invention or construction along with re-evaluation of interpretation flowing from action and its repercussions.

Applying Weick's (1995, p.9) logic, most implementation environments provide "the material of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain." When a municipality, for instance, considers providing low cost housing, ordinarily, it must come to terms with a complex and indeterminate situation in which land, financial, technological, topological, political and economic issues are all entangled. As has happened in many municipalities in South Africa, once a municipality has decided on the type of housing and building requirements, they have to consider how to provide services such as electricity, water, sanitation, refuse removal, amenities, etc., which unavoidably lead to other issues of logistics, affordability and sustainability. A municipality then might in fact find itself again in a situation of uncertainty. As an implementing agency, a municipality then comes to realise that a housing problem as a "problem setting" is not itself a technical problem, rather it is a condition that creates the need for a technical solution. Elaborating on problem setting, Weick (1995, p.9) sees it as a key component of professional work (e.g., implementation activities) which involves "a process in which, interactively, we name the things to which we will attend and frame the context in which we will attend to them."

To understand how sensemaking affects program activities at organisational and individual levels, the linkage between sensemaking and collective action in implementation needs to be examined. Retrospective sensemaking is directed at events that have elapsed and is based on the idea, of acting first and then making sense of the action afterwards. Explicitly, Weick (1995, p.30) asks the question: "how can I know what I did until I see what I have produced?." In contrast, conversional implementation approaches tend to move from the premise that implementing agents, first and foremost, need to develop and understand the plans and their ramifications, before they act. Implementation programs can only be then actualised through a collectively coordinated and consistent execution. This is a simpler view of the action formation process, which is steeped in traditional institutionalism that presupposes a relatively linear and unidirectional cognition-to-action passageway. According to Weick (1995), the relationship between cognition and action is much more complex than the rational means-ends framework of cognition prior to action implies.

An empirical study of how implementation activities influence sensemaking by Stensaker et al. (2008) found that individuals who actively participate in the translation and interpretation

of policy intentions into action plans gain an improved understanding of implementation initiatives and the logic behind them. Stensaker et al. (2008, p.176) cite research (Pasmore & Fagan, 1992; Ashmos et al., 2002; Li & Butler, 2004) which argue that “participation leads to greater commitment and motivation.” Thus, actively taking part in planning assists the sensemaking of grassroots actors. However, Stensaker et al. (2008) caution that whilst participation in action planning is of central importance, too much planning may hamper action. In addition, not all actors in the organisation can participate owing to the ongoing nature of projects and limited time available. Hence, participation is not always sufficient to ensure overall organisational sensemaking, unitary accounts and consistent action.

Stensaker et al.’s (2008, p.177) study found four reasons why participating in planning is seldom adequate for organisational sensemaking: “a) inconsistencies appear once action is required; b) structural and social pressures create false agreements, c) plans are not sophisticated sensegiving devices, and d) individuals need to go through their own sensemaking process.” Based on these explanations, Stensaker et al. (2008, p.177) suggest that participation in planning “must be coupled with other implementation activities that foster a shared understanding for and commitment to change as representative participation fails to produce shared and unified accounts of change across organisational departments and levels.” According to Weick’s (1995, p.30), “forecasting, contingency planning, strategic planning, and other magical probes into the future... [are] wasteful and misleading if they are decoupled from reflective action and history.”

Instead of focusing on activities that are aimed at cognitive understanding prior to any action, what sensemaking does is to help us understand the construction, labelling, bracketing and interpretation of cues from ongoing experience in the implementation environment. In addition, sensemaking provides us with analytical tools to grapple with the adjustment of interpretations emanating from actual implementation activities and subsequent outcomes (Weick, 1995, p.8). Trial and error actions or simply issuing guidelines on what should be done are examples of emphasising action beforehand with the rationale and understanding coming from the actions. Citing Morgan et al. (1983), Weick’s (1993, p.16) writes: “the basic idea of sensemaking is that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from effort to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs.” Maitlis (2005, p.21) draws on Weick’s work to point out that making sense of ongoing events, organisational actors make plausible stories by means of general descriptions, which are “discursive constructions of reality... or ‘activation’ of existing accounts.”

Gioia and Mehra (1996, p.1228) draw from Weick to argue that accounts and language serve as the stuff of sensemaking because they “arrest, abstract, and inscribe the otherwise evanescent behaviours and utterances that make up the stream of ongoing events that swirls about us.” Accounts, in this sense, are a symbolic process through which interpretative schemes or images of reality are created, sustained or recreated. To realise their reality, individuals in part rationalise their actions by “reading into their situation patterns of significant meaning” (Weick, 1993, p.16). Accounts in implementation context, as discursive construction of reality that interpret and explain, take a multiplicity of types, such as construction, translation, description and clarification of policy content, capacity and context.

4.3 The Sensemaking view of the critical variables and their interactions

In attempting to assess important factors abetting and hindering the realisation of effective implementation, analysis of the critical variables (from the 5C protocol) and their interaction using a sensemaking framework is aimed at unravelling the complexity of implementation, along with revealing probable sources of any “implementation gap” and its mediation. The arguments to follow goes further than the usual application of sensemaking theory in organisational studies, which focuses on organisational change and identity, or else by explaining the breakdown of sensemaking during disasters, highlights meaning-making at different institutional levels during implementation.

To this end, this chapter weaves together elements from the sensemaking framework, knowledge management and institutional theory with the critical variables identified in the implementation literature to better understand the implementation process. Whilst this improved understanding will likely not improve our ability to predict implementation outcomes, it will certainly temper our expectations regarding outcomes. The analysis brings together sensemaking as a language for understanding, institutional theory in order to shed light on the role of the larger context, of policy implementation as pivoting on successful knowledge management.

To make the connection between institutionalism as a theory of context and sensemaking as a meaning-making activity, the chapter follows the work of Webber and Glenn (2006), who argue that the organisational conditions guide and constrain the sensemaking of the organisational members, whose efforts were triggered by the experience of interruptions or ambiguity.

The subsections that follow discuss the relevant resources and results from sensemaking, institutional theory, and knowledge management, in turn, for each of the critical variables of the 5C protocol, namely context, content, capacity, commitment, and clients & coalitions. The sensemaking aspects reveal themselves best in the interaction between these variables, so the analysis will consider the sensemaking aspect of institutional context, the interaction between policy content and the institutional context, the interaction between content, context, and capacity, the sensemaking role of commitment, and the links to clients and coalitions.

4.3.1 Links to Institutional Context

In the social world of social politics, the delivery of services to vulnerable target groups constitutes an institution on the grounds that beneficiaries of service delivery demonstrate several standardised behavioural action patterns in response to particular situations. In this circumstance, a sensemaking rendering of implementation must commence with the provision that the context of implementation as an institution is “real” only to the degree that it is invariably enacted (or re-enacted) and negotiated (or re-negotiated) in the social interaction among policy designers, implementers and target groups. Although the building blocks of implementation are to be found in policy content (e.g. statutes or legal documents of agencies mandated to oversee projects; staff employed to carry out tasks, allocated resources, etc.), implementation initiatives only become real once grassroots actors start taking action, adapting policy or adjusting their behaviours, or work, to a situational context. Commonly accepted as a crucial link in the policy-making chain by bottom-up scholars, social policies, as service delivery programs, only come to life through the medium of social patterns of engagement between implementers and target groups.

Drawing on the conceptual tools offered by a combination of sensemaking and a reformulation of institutionalisation, we can see how institutions precede, and emerge from, sensemaking processes. Sewell (1992, p.16) attempts to reformulate structuration theory to apply it to institutions and in the process makes an argument that different institutional structures vary significantly such that they have different logics and dynamics: “societies are based on practices that derive from distinct structures, which exist at different levels, operate in different modalities, and are themselves based on widely varying types and quantities of resources.” These important variations even within an institutional sphere attest to conditions in which reflectivity is triggered among actors as a result of ambiguities occasioned by “polysemic institutional structures.” Webber and Glynn (2006, p.1654) describe the nature of

these institutional gaps and how they are experienced: “the same processes that make identities, situations and action expectations coherent enough to be typified and institutionalised, prompt actors to experience contradictions.”

According Webber and Glynn (2006), the subsequent experience of losing established meanings occasioned by the plurality of institutional logics, contradictions, institutional gaps, and ambiguities trigger increased sensemaking activity in an effort to re-establish meaning. Sensemaking activities involved in creating and maintaining generic meanings tend to withstand change and persevere, thus allowing stability. However, it is at the micro-level of social interaction, where individual actors engage in activities that have the effect of re-creating and innovating intersubjective meanings on an ongoing basis, which result in a continuously disrupting transition from intersubjective meanings to generic meanings. If the disruption persists, tension and indecision escalate which potentially lead to conflict and destabilisation of organisational knowledge that ultimately precipitates a crisis.

Besides inherent institutional ambiguity that triggers sensemaking, to maintain stability of institutionalised order and its roles, institutions provide dynamic foci that demand continued attention which require ongoing sensemaking process (Webber & Glynn, 2006, p.1653). As an example, institutional typification of accountability in local government pivots around hierarchical interactions between bureaucrats and public representatives. Accountability, in this sense, highlights the theme of complexity for institutional actors and proceeds through such ritualised procedures (scripts) as outlined in performance regimes used by all instruments of institutional governance (e.g., levels of government, lawmakers, courts); political office bearers; operational unit (e.g. line departments); policy programs or projects; service delivery agencies; as well as individuals employees.

To steer implementation to specific forms of performance, which may entail uniformity with internal processes and service delivery standards, several different types of accountability are identifiable in the interaction among institutional actors. For a manager in a municipality, for instance, these systems of accountability are interchangeable and they continually shift in intervals of time. A symbolic exhortation is when a manager is implored to “take off the engineering hat and put on a management hat.” This calls on an individual to adopt a disposition to act in ways that are attuned to the situation in a specific way and to foreground the requisite behaviour of her identity as a manager, and not as an expert, based on the appropriate situational frame as an agent of the employer. As we can see, even when entrenched ways of doing things firmly constrain behaviour within the confines of a

predefined role-frame, deviations invariably arise about which particular identity and frame are spurred in a setting.

The sensemaking question then becomes, which identity and frame are likely to be actuated in a particular local setting? According to Cardinale (2018) the elimination of possibilities enabled by structure to one course of action (orienting) depends on the encounter between the actors' current position (environment), which is shaped by each actor's historic positioning. This means that the positions that an actor currently occupies (social structure) and the prior history of previous positionings, account for which frame and identity are roused in a situation.

The connection between institution and sensemaking can be conceived of as identities, frames and performance expectations that constitute the substance of multiple rounds of ongoing sensemaking that yield the institution, which in turn enables and constrains the range of sense to be made. Institutions as the basis for interplay among identities, frames and performance expectation may guide action in a direct, long-established way. In particular situational contexts people notice and extract cues which trigger certain identities, frames and performance expectations that, in return, have as consequences signification for action and additional attention (Webber & Glynn, 2006, p.1648). The role an actor assumes in a particular situation is then a function of the combination of identity and frames of meaning relevant to that situation, and, a blend of frames and action combine to approximate the notion of "situational script" (Webber and Glynn, 2006, p.1644). For example, contradictions between or within institutions may manifest in several identities which suggest numerous possible institutionalised performance expectations. Similarly, one particular performance may hint at multiple identities and frames (ambiguity).

In day-to-day interactions, institutional logics pertinent to particular settings will be self-evident in behavioural characteristics peculiar to that environment, and will manifest as local surrogates of more universal principles. According to Barley and Tolbert (1997, p.7), scripts are "observable, recurrent activities and patterns of interaction characteristic of a particular setting" that encode the social logic of what Goffman (1983) calls "interactional order." Embedded in these scripts is organisational knowledge of generic meanings that are shared and disseminated among organisational members, whether or not they are participating in their construction, or merely in their perpetuation.

Expectation of performance and conduct which necessitates identity construction in different situations introduces moments of surprise and emotions that trigger active sensemaking. Whereas the larger internalised cognitive constraints (taken-for-grantedness) provide several possible and plausible categories of identities, role-expectation and actions (and their combinations), each one institutionalised, actual local context delivers the cues that play a bigger part in action creation. This implies that local context acts as a guide that navigates (prime) applicable institutional norms over macro-institutional settings.

Whereas institutions exert influence on the implementation process, they do not completely predetermine its outcome. Independent actions of organisational actors may modify the meaning or scope of an institutional impact on implementation, thereby the systemic environment, of which an institution is a constituent part. From a sensemaking perspective, social reality involves the interplay of intersubjective actions, generic or increasingly routinised actions, which lead to the emergence of institutions that form part of larger economic, political and cultural systemic landscape.

According to Daft and Weick (1984, p.286), at a basic level, institutions play a role in sensemaking, because they shape how meaning is made via information processing mechanisms, interpretation processes and learning. Thus, Weick (1995, pp.106-132) view institutions as the “feedstock of sensemaking” which are directly implicated in sensemaking because they provide “the substance” or “raw material” of sensemaking. The idea of minimal sensible structures (a cue connected to a frame) resonates with the concept of generalised symbolic media shared and exchanged among actors within and between diverse institutional domains that “bind some people together and help them to make sense of their worlds” (Weick, 1995, p.111).

Weick (1995, p.53) sees institutional context as useful for driving sensemaking because it “binds people to actions that they then must justify, it affects the saliency of information, and it provides norms and expectations that constrain explanations.” In addition, the larger social context does not only constrain sensemaking from the top but is intricately part of the sensemaking process. Since people are part of the environment, when they act, they create the material that becomes constraints or opportunities they must deal with. Therefore, the wider social context is not a fixed or monolithic setting external to, and far removed from individual experiences. Without supplied context, objects and events have multiple meanings or are

equivocal. Thus, how cues are noticed, interpreted and meaning assigned depend on the situational context in which cues are extracted.

Institutional context also edits sensemaking in that the expectations other individuals form for the conduct of other actors, based on institutionalised roles and scripts, shift attention to subsequent social policing of deviant actions. Without this outside pressure, rather than inside the performer, institutional expectations of performance are likely to flounder. Weick (1995) acknowledge the importance of social appraisal in sensemaking thus: “Sense may be in the eyes of the beholder, but beholders vote and majority rules” (p.6). Institutions, as a context for sensemaking, therefore, influence others’ “expectations of performance that comes along with an identity and situational frame as much as they influence the performer” (Webber & Glynn, 2006, 1651). The performer’s enactments set in motion feedback processes in a social interaction sequence. Both the action of an actor and expectation of social partners are inputs in a contextual mechanism, and output involves institutions serving to “edit, modify and amend the emerging sense in social interactions” (Webber and Glynn, 2006, p.1652).

In closing, institutions as social structures are directly and inextricably tied to the constitution of interaction. Since sensemaking is retrospective and driven by extracted cues and plausibility, it is only with hindsight that justifications are required to make sense events that have already occurred. This implies that institutional content not only enters sensemaking with pre-existing internalised notions of what is expected, but enters in reactions, justifications and negotiations in social interaction with other organisational actors in order to sharpen understanding of the institutions, after unwittingly enacted deviant behaviours (Webber & Glynn, 2006, p.1644).

4.3.2 Policy content-context interaction

The founding fathers of implementation scholarship (Derthick, 1970; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Murphy, 1973; Bardach, 1977) recognised earlier on that simply translating and transmitting instructions from the top to the bottom is not sufficient to ensure effective implementation of public policy. However, conventional accounts of implementation that hone in on policy design, social problems, compliance, or capacity of individuals responsible for implementing policy offer explanations that are premised on rational choice and principal-agent theories. The explanations suggest a normative perspective in which top officials require the compliance of agents at local level to realise policy intentions as outlined in

policy documents (e.g., legislation, regulations). Hence, appropriate monitoring systems and incentives are recommended as crucial, if top officials are to achieve particular outcomes.

According to Spillane et al. (2002, p.389), rational choice theory presupposes self-interest as the motivating force in decision-making for both the principal and agents, based on the idea that “utility maximisation is the guiding principle for human behaviour.” From this standpoint, implementation agents and agencies are seen as having underlying motives and frameworks by which to form judgements or make decisions. Based on this perspective, enactment of policies is substantially shaped by the aforementioned factors, along with local context. This implies that grassroots actors are more likely to implement or modify policy proposals that conform to their own or/and implementing agency’s interests and agendas, and intentionally ignore, drastically revise or reject those they regard as unworkable, harmful or unacceptable.

Many conventional accounts of implementation are based on rational choice notions. Consequently, the assumption, notwithstanding variations in variables foregrounded, is that implementing agents and agencies fully comprehend the intentions of policy proposals, or that misapprehension is a function of the failure of policy designers to craft unambiguous policy with respect to expected behaviour from implementers or social problems being addressed (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Lipsky, 1980; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1981). Some conventional theorists make room for implementation problems that result from an understanding, or lack thereof, of policy messages (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984; Berman, 1978).

Normative accounts that portray, either explicitly or implicitly, local actors as wilfully working to sabotage policy directives from the top that do not serve their self-interest are inadequate to explain ineffective implementation in which actors usually work hard to realise policy or directive from above. To arrive at a determination that a policy directive is inconsistent with agendas and interests for implementation agents’ utility maximisation, it should foremost be established whether agents and agencies understand what it is that the policy proposal requires them to do. In pursuance of this effort, a sensemaking framework cautions against attributing implementation failure merely to issues of inadequate capacity (skills, knowledge, human and material resources) or deliberate interpretation of a policy message to fit predefined ends.

Beyond simply allowing us to unpack the translation and dissemination policy content as understood in conventional accounts, sensemaking allow us to examine the different ways in which implementation agents interpret or act on understandings, taking into cognisance complexity of the meaning making process. Policy proposals as communicated to implementers are not a static or passively held notion conveyed unadulterated into the unquestioning agents' minds to be obeyed, adapted, or rejected, based purely on the basis of local needs and circumstances. If an implementation problem is conceptualised in this fashion, our attention turns to local actors' construction of the meaning of policy content and how they understand their own behaviour. The extent to which sensemaking and sensegiving activities in implementation facilitate grassroots actors' rapport with policy intention, according Spillane et al. (2002, p.392), "leads to or does not lead to change in how they view their own practice, potentially leading to changes in both understanding and behaviour."

The interactive web of organisational actors' cognitive structures, social interactions, policy signals, and institutional context are important dimensions that constitute elements of analysis of how implementation agents construct meaning of a policy message. Social interactions assist sensemaking in the implementation process because individuals and groups can learn from each other, and, more importantly, perspectives and insights that might otherwise remain tacit are explicated as actors articulate a particular point of view. Cognitive structures, in this context, refers to beliefs, attitude, repertoire of experience and prior knowledge that play a role in shaping the implementing agents' understanding of policy proposals and how they respond to it. To adapt their thoughts and change extant behaviours as they actively construct meaning of and react to 'new policies' or policy changes, implementing agents employ their experiences, ideas, and expertise to notice, to interpret, and to make sense of policy and convert that understanding into action.

Sensemaking in implementation focuses attention on significant cues in the environment, including the "what of policy", which from the onset is embodied in policy text encapsulating goals, problem definition, and method. This formulation reveals a sensemaking commitment in terms of which past understandings is used to see what is novel. For implementing agents and agencies to understand what they see themselves doing as they "generate what they interpret" and enact the environment they have to deal with by noticing and selecting cues from policy signals that they interpret (Weick, 1995, p.34). The beliefs actors hold about the organisation determines their actions in respect of selectively extracted cues form stream of events, actions and policies Weick (1995).

Additionally, underlying assumptions, which themselves are seeded from previous experience, exert an influence on inclinations about what constitutes a meaningful cue. According to Weick (1995, p.35), “action in response to cue will be influenced by these underlying assumptions, and will in turn affect future assumptions.” Weick emphasises that the foregoing process is “ongoing and retrospective.” It does not represent a rational consideration of facts and alternatives, rather it is an automatic response to puzzling situations that arise, and will be based on a plausible reading of a given situation rather than ‘reality’.

By analysing policy text, which represents ideas about the intentions of policymakers, we should be able to identify local understanding of a policy that are either consistent or inconsistent with some of its intentions; and, that include misinterpretation on the part of implementing agencies and agents. The differences in interpretation of the same policy text, and how meanings and definitions of the situation are created, are more predictive of the level of implementation than agencies or agents’ perfunctory attention to, or presumed rebuff, of policy intention (Spillane et al., 2002). Examining the way actors construct different understanding of policy and influence others’ understanding require us to take into account the fact that implementation is an intricate phenomena, comprising multi-layered levels of interlocking networks.

The dimension of social context comprising both macro- and micro-levels is a multifaceted construct that is important for the sensemaking and action of implementing agents. To understand the pace and direction of implementation as outlined in policy objective, causality and method, we need to study the mechanisms of the interconnections of the framings of meaning across different levels. Each layer might attach different meaning to policy such that understanding of cues and subsequent actions are influenced by different framings of the same situation. Rhetorical discourse of policy content framed by macro-level players is transformed as actors at lower layers of the implementation process garner new justifications, meanings and significance as it goes along. This leads to significant re-workings or reformulation or adaptation of macro policy which may result in important decoupling of meanings, which to some degree echo Weick’s notion of organisations as a ‘loosely coupled systems’.

Inspired by insights from institutional theory, our interest is not only on a single implementing agency or stratum of service delivery structure; instead, the task is to examine

how multiple loci of meaning making operating in the larger service delivery system affect micro-implementation. The premise, according to Blumer (1969, p.19), is: “a network or an institution does not function automatically because of some inner dynamics of system requirements; it functions because people at different points do something, and what they do is a result of how they define the situation in which they are called upon to act.” The interconnection and interdependence of meanings between levels, this research argues, should explain the varying pace, the course along which implementation moves, and eventually its degree of policy goal attainment. For each level, the focus should explore: a) the defining characteristics of implementation relevant to it; b) the rationale or justification or purpose according to the level; and c) the means by which implementation will be presented within a level.

The strength of the link between policy content and context is informed by an argument that at each level of the policy process a frame evolves into a form upon which conceptual or cognitive schemes mould how policies are perceived and, in return, how they are enacted. The following illustration demonstrates a potentially plausible scenario for varying frames, rationales and presentations of a government housing policy as part of a service delivery project. At macro level (e.g. national government) framing involves the definitional component of a housing policy which centre on delivering x number of houses to y number of people within predefined time intervals. The government’s rationale is to significantly increase the delivery of housing and improve the welfare of disadvantaged communities. The case is presented in policy documents, whose language tone tend to be aspirational and often in stark contrast with the challenges and incremental impact of policy at the local level, where implementation outcomes should manifest.

At the meso level (e.g. provincial government, intermediary agencies, regions, districts), the framing is to provide services to support implementing agencies at micro level by redesigning and providing support to implementing agencies in line with “the needs of the people.” As a result, the meso frame definitions of policy and situation are more clearly attentive than those presented by a high sphere of government; that is, they are increasingly specific about the core characteristics of housing policy such as budget prioritisation, land, logistics and capacity requirements. While the defining characteristics of a housing policy provided at the meso level are in accord with the spirit of policy to increase housing delivery, the rationale at the meso level is transformed. The main aims are to support implementing agents and agencies to think and act differently. The core elements of presenting a case at this level are

learning and support networks: providing guidance, diffusion of best practices and expertise advice on specific issues.

At the micro level, however, meanings on the ground are somewhat messier, more complex and far less coherent. Definitions of situations and meanings are intertwined with ‘reality’, transformed, and ambiguities linked to a shift in policy adaption are more apparent. While the rationale for policy presented at both the macro and meso frame are clear cut, increasing delivery of houses, justifications at grass roots level are a function of cognitive structures and more complex negotiations between individuals and groups at different sites. Emergent meanings that determined the direction of implementation at this level are more likely to be strongly influenced by inter-subjective interactions, notably amongst individuals in groups whose dispositions could in practice be roughly or ideally characterised as ‘pragmatists’, ‘idealists’, ‘sceptics’ or ‘opportunists’ than by the framing provided at macro and meso levels.

The interest groupings identified above tend to manifest in the following behaviours. Opportunists see a housing delivery program as a chance to do something that had already been planned or was developing in furtherance of their own agendas to benefit from the program. Pragmatists grapple with practical and local issues by notably focusing attention on the challenge of delivering houses to target clients. Idealists eagerly espouse the bigger policy vision and its philosophical rationale. Finally, sceptics might view service delivery program as entrenching an ‘attitude of entitlement’ among beneficiaries and urge for restraint in an attempt to temper excessive idealism or opportunism.

From the foregoing illustration, the relationships between different meanings of policy content developed at different framing levels interact to produce variation in the implementation. The differences arising from framing of the same policy at various levels of implementation of the same policy serve as evidence of implementation gaps, which attest to the strength of the connections between frames. It is the magnitude of these connections that determine whether enactment of policy at field level becomes “lost in translation” or is, to a reasonable degree, consistent with policy intentions. Whereas framing at macro- and meso-level might provide the requisite organisational and political conceptual backdrop, effective policy enactment at the micro-implementation might require each locality to adapt framing in the interest of creativity and innovation. In framing meaning, a space needs to be allowed

which opens up opportunities for implementing agents to exercise discretion to produce variants of ostensibly rigid bureaucratic rules.

Like most attempts at synthesising divergent implementation perspectives, a sensemaking view of implementation integrates elements from the main streams. Insights from top-down about policy text and the manner in which policy message is translated and communicated (e.g. degree of ambiguity or conflict) influence how implementation agents come to construct the meaning of policy. Likewise, the spirit of policy and intention of policymakers serve as yardsticks against which to analyse and weigh different ways in which implementation agents and agencies interpret and understand policy signals. The bottom-up perspective is particularly important because central to the sensemaking process is the interaction of implementing agents' beliefs, expectations, knowledge, experience, and the social context in which grassroots players endeavour to make sense of policy.

4.3.3 Content-context-capacity interaction

Like most of the literature on implementation, Najam (1995) conceives of capacity as mandated in policy content, which entails identifying the nature, types, role and extent of resources required for effective implementation. Whereas Najam acknowledges questions of power and domination related to using resources as a lever to reward or punish the behaviour of implementing agents, his treatment of capacity as a crucial variable is not sufficiently theorised to integrate it with the current thinking in management and organisational theories. Instead, he embraces a narrower conception of capacity advocated by early top-down perspective protagonists. Explicitly, "the first task in attempting to understand this variable is to catalogue the level of administrative capacity mandated in the said policy, and available to the relevant agencies" (Najam, 1995, p.50).

Implicitly, analysis of administrative capacity adopts simplified assumptions based on a resource-based view of implementation that focuses on strategically relevant resources that are strategically controlled from the top in pursuance of particular outcomes, including efforts to influence the disposition of implementing agencies and agents. According to resource-based theorists, organisational resources include all assets, material and human capital resources, capabilities, information, knowledge, organisational processes, organisational attributes, etc. (Barney, 1991,) that can be used by an organisation to conceive of and carry out strategies that are aimed at improving its efficiency and effectiveness. A resource-based perspective maintains that organisations can be conceptualised as an assemblage of resources

(Penrose, 1959; Wernerfelt, 1984, in Tsoukas, 2002); and knowledge is considered as just one among other stocks of resources that can be strategically used to help an organisation achieve “competitive advantage” (Barney 1991, p.103).

According to Penrose (1959), the key to understanding an organisation’s performance is “not to focus on the given resources... but on the services rendered by those resources” (in Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001, p.981). To effectively deploy its resources, an organisation need to foster a “distinctive way of thinking and acting” that is embedded in a set of collective understanding (Penrose, 1959; Blackler, 1995; Collins, 1990; in Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001, p.981). Teece et al. (1997) expands this position by arguing that, instead of focusing on a bundle of resources an organisation possesses, what matters are its processes and the mechanisms by which it alters its resource base. The rationale is that there are challenges inherent in a resource-based approach in terms of strategies to build and sustain organisational capabilities. As an example, a resource-based view fails to adequately explain lack of performance in rapidly changing or unpredictable situations for some of the well-resourced organisations.

The resources-based view is extended by proponents of a ‘dynamic capabilities’ framework to offer insights into the processes or strategic routines by which resources are acquired, integrated together and reconfigured. Dynamic capabilities shed light on organisational processes that guide and facilitate new value-creating strategies by exploring mechanisms underlying the development of organisational capabilities (Teece et al., 1997; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Nielsen, 2006). According to Grant, (1996, p.377), an organisational capability is the ability of an organisation to recurrently perform tasks that result in the creation of “value through effecting the transformation of inputs into outputs.” Whereas organisational capabilities are the basic requirement for producing services and products, dynamic capabilities safeguard ongoing development and rejuvenation of organisational capabilities.

For our purpose, the concept of dynamic capacities underscores the fact that having a strong resources base and organisational capabilities is not sufficient to guarantee effective implementation. What is also required, from the perspective of implementation capacity, are strong organisation processes and strategies that are aimed at continuously integrating different resources that enable implementing agencies to develop and renew organisational capabilities.

Extant empirical research on the nature of dynamic capabilities in the literature focuses on organisation processes, particular adopted strategies, and decision making processes (Teece et al., 1997). These areas are examined to assess whether an organisation is building or enhancing organisation capabilities in pursuit of sustainable competitive advantage in a fluctuating business environment. On the other hand, Eisenhardt and Martin (2002, p.1106) highlight the generalisable applicability of the nature of dynamic capabilities based on their ability to evolve: “since the functionality of dynamic capabilities can be duplicate across firms, their value for competitive advantage lies in the resource configuration that they create, not in the capabilities themselves.” Most important, this evolution is guided by the manipulation of knowledge resources which involves recognised learning opportunities, acquiring skills and building capacity as strategic issues in relation to their effect on performance.

Since our interest is implementation capacity in the public sector, the value of analysis of organisational capabilities or competencies assumes an organisational lens, rather than an economic modelling one. This thesis, therefore, embraces an understanding of dynamic capabilities as efforts by which implementing agencies “synthesize and acquire knowledge resources, and generate new application from these resources” (Kogut & Zander, 1992; in Eisenhardt & Martin, 2002, p.1107). The appreciation of knowledge as a strategic asset that contributes to value-creation makes it overwhelmingly important as a productive resource that underpins a knowledge-based view of an organisation (Grant, 1996).

A knowledge-based view allows us to link the constituents of dynamic capabilities with concrete knowledge management processes and routines that are geared towards drawing value from other resources. The link, according to Neilsen (2006, p.76), connects knowledge management activities with “three key dynamic capabilities of knowledge development, knowledge (re)combination and knowledge use.” Knowledge management activities triggered by these three dynamic capabilities are iteratively implicated in manipulating knowledge and the transformation of flows to and from an organisation’s repository of knowledge. These flows contribute to the creation and use of organisational capabilities and competences. Once created, acquired or captured, knowledge-based resources from an organisational stock of knowledge are shared, assembled and integrated to form and renew organisational competencies and capabilities.

Flowing from the above discussion, it can be posited that knowledge is more than just a resource amongst the category of a resource-based understanding of organisational resources. Rather, knowledge can assist organisations to develop and improve material resources, human resources, capital resources, and organisational processes, attributes and capabilities (Barney, 1991). In this sense, an analysis of implementation capacity can be moved a step further by conceiving resources as constituting “one or another type of knowledge, and hence can be developed and improved by enhancing the repositories of organisational knowledge” (Haider, 2003, p.12).

The connection between resources, critical organisational processes and organisational knowledge could be illustrated by the different types of knowledge requirements that an organisation identifies as essential for operational and functional performance. For instance these knowledge requirements entail the knowledge regarding technical and technological know-how relating to material capital resources (e.g., machinery, equipment, technology, infrastructure, standards, etc..), the knowledge regarding social skills (such as building relationships, trustworthiness, managing expectations, dependencies, responsibilities, etc.), and the knowledge regarding organisational capabilities, competencies or expertise (e.g. operational, management and decision making know-how) relating to intellectual capital resources. Dynamic organisational capabilities thus include the knowledge-related ability to recognise and address existing “knowledge gaps” in the organisation given the knowledge requirements.

Knowledge requirements that an implementing agency currently lacks but identifies as important for effective implementation are known knowledge gaps (Haider, 2003). During their normal operations, implementation agencies encounter events where knowledge gaps reveal themselves on a continuous basis, but a moment of recognition and interpretation is still required.

The close link between knowledge and action stressed in the literature (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Davenport & Prosak, 1998; Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001) finds traction in the dynamic view of organisational knowledge that draws parallels with knowledge creation, sensemaking and decision making (Choo, 1998). According to Choo (1996, p.329), these closely connected foregoing three processes need to be managed effectively in order to create a “knowing organisation that is perceptive, wise and decisive.” Choo (1996, p.339) goes further to argue that a knowing organisation possesses knowledge and information “that confers a

special advantage, allowing it to manoeuvre with intelligence, creativity and occasionally, cunning.” Such an organisation is able to cultivate and promote a coherent vision that will lead to actions that are based on shared and practical understanding of the implementation environment. By looking at the challenges of policy implementation from a “knowing organisation” perspective, implementation actors who are responsible for mobilising and deploying resources can leverage knowledge-based resources to optimally exploit scarce material resources.

As was shown in the previous chapter, knowledge that is produced in the implementation processes is informed by the beliefs, interpretations, and enactment of the sensemaking process. Although sensemaking function refers to the process used by organisation members to make sense of their environment, their identities and their action, sensemaking alone does not result in organisational action. It is the decisions that are made as a result of the sensemaking process that contribute to effective implementation. Organisational actors use their shared understanding and the knowledge they have generated to make decisions, which, pertinently, also include decisions about material resource mobilisation and deployment. Therefore, decisions influence and are influenced by the sense made and the knowledge created during the process of problem-solving.

Lipsky (1980) and Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) noted earlier on that policy implementation is the outcome of a decision-making process. Decision making practices include rules espoused by organisations on preference for discretion in decision making at micro-level, and how to apply policy. By designing action and decision routines based on what its members know and believe, the organisation is able to choose and commit itself to appropriate courses of action that will enable it to adapt and thrive. Resolving conflict from competing interests and priorities in deciding where and the manner in which to deploy resources relies not only on information and knowledge creation but also on the decision-making practices within the organisation. This could be achieved when an organisation pays attention to cues from the environment, attends to and makes sense of such signals. By mobilising knowledge and expertise of its members, an implementing agency organisation is constantly learning and innovating.

4.3.4 Links to commitment

A fundamental issue with the commitment variable cluster in the implementation literature is how discretion and support for policy combine to impact implementation (Najam, 1995).

From a top-down perspective, policy content and concomitant capacity allocation provision, which are generally administered by officials at the top, shape the implementing agents' commitment. Whilst also accepting the importance of policy content and capacity in implementation, a fundamentalist bottom-up approach tends to emphasise the influence of institutional context and clients and coalitions on the commitment of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980; in Najam, p.45). In discussing the subject of commitment, bottom-up perspective scholars overwhelmingly focus on the level of discretion afforded to front-line workers with regard to what they are entrusted to do. Although this emphasis is not misplaced, as shall be argued below, the degree of discretion at this level is not the only rationale for treating commitment as a critical variable.

To describe ideal conditions in which the commitment variable is critical at both micro- and macro-level, all stages in the implementation process where committed and uncommitted actors might influence implementation effectiveness should be examined.

According to Weick (1995, p.159), "committed and uncommitted people examine things differently. And having inspected them differently, they naturally see different things." Before commitment is made, all kinds of intuitive understandings, misgivings, experiences, and explanations are present, emanating from uncommitted actions. Commitment develops in an evolving situation among diverse actors (at both macro- and micro-level) who support policy, those against it, and those lackadaisical to it. Commitment, then, is the source of order and value because it transforms less organised perceptions into more orderly patterns. This happens because organisational actors "try hardest to build meaning around actions to which their commitment is strongest" (Weick, 1995, p.156). Hence, commitment is arguably a reference point for sensemaking.

Given that policy design is often unclear about goals, theories of causality and methods, elaborate and persuasive set of justification are developed to facilitate actors' participation, deployment of scarce resources, and rationale to stakeholders. Thus, justification can become a reality in many implementation settings. Through justification, perceived source of ambiguity can be explained away or be replaced by shared meanings. Building on Eden (1992), beliefs and actions that are grounded in expectations which give pointers to interpretations of policy goals and have an effect on implementation process become a resource for commitment (in Weick, 1993, p.145). A committed interpretation,

therefore, is according to Weick (1993, p.21), “a sensemaking process that introduces stability into an equivocal flow of event by means of justifications that increase social order.”

Commitment at both macro- and micro-level is generated and imposes a form of logic on the interpretation of actions in a setting when behaviour or actions of actors are visible (clear evidence the action occurred and that important people saw it), irrevocable (action cannot be reversed), and volitional (responsibility is taken for the action) (Weick, 1995, p.156 - 162). To build these settings, a micro-level recipe to produce commitment include low tolerance of mistakes in order to strengthen commitment by increasing the necessity for actors to justify whatever they are doing (Weick, 1995, p.158). The downside of a low tolerance for mistakes is that it could also weaken choice, and therefore discretion. At micro-level, ideal committing conditions strengthen accountability by binding actors to consequences when their actions occur in a “context of high choice, high irreversibility, and high visibility.” When implementing agents take action under these conditions, enacted ensuing events may serve to justify of prior action. Thus, Weick (1993, p.13) argues that “justification can become an important source of social structure, culture and norms.”

Implementation activities abound with potential committing conditions. Most of what actors do is seen by others actors; choices and decisions are made; choices commit resources to programs and structures that are not reversible; participation is used to raise ownership (commitment); and the motivational backdrop to improve the wellbeing of others by delivering services is portrayed as a decision to participate - a decision to produce and a psychological contract. Implementation agencies that create a context that is high on all the foregoing three dimensions should generate stronger commitment, richer justification and make more sense to members. By contrast, organisations that create contexts that are low on these three dimensions should make less sense to members because there are fewer reasoned justifications, and more alternative possibilities concerning what subsequent action may mean and what interpretations may be available.

Whereas macro entities are generally invoked to justify commitment and many actors continue to use them as explanations, commitment and sensemaking are promising concepts that can broaden the micro side of macro topics and offset the dominance of macro perspectives in organisational analysis (Weick, 1993, p.13). The context in which the strength or weakness of commitment is generated provides the possibility to catalogue all points in the implementation process where an organisation scores low or high on all the three committing

dimensions. It is therefore important to focus on the formulation of policy implementation as a moving target which travels through various levels, rather than the duality of commitment characteristic of either the top-down (control of implementer disposition) or the bottom-up (implementer commitment) exclusive emphasis.

Instead of the analysis of commitment focusing only on individual commitment, it should be borne in mind that commitment is grounded on social relationships and is justified by social entities. As an example, activities in which top managers and middle manager actors co-determine strategic outcomes are joint efforts to synthesise frames into implementation strategy. These interactions are volitional, public and irrevocable behaviours that bind both parties and necessitate an explanation that justifies the relationship. Committed interpretations are also social in the sense that justifications chosen to explain committed interactions are socially acceptable within the setting where commitment occurred. Lastly social structure is often invoked to justify commitment. Client and coalitions, for instance, justify their interests and actions by invoking silent communities for whom they serve as advocates. Taking into account this crucial social dimension of commitment implies that commitment becomes a more powerful tool to track sensemaking and the emergence of social structure in organisations.

Studies found that different stakeholders rely on “deep core beliefs” in their preferences for implementing various aspects of policy (Weible et al., 2004; in Mischen & Sinclair, 2007, p.147). Beliefs are the obvious anchor in organisational sensemaking because they are found in ideologies, cultures, scripts and traditions (Weick, 1995, p.155). However, organisational actors in hierarchical bureaucracies are limited in creating context propitious to sensibleness owing to entrenched formalisation, tradition and centralisation which reduce occasions for discretion. Consequently, members in bureaucracies inherit explanations of what they are doing more than constructing them occasionally.

The South African constitution entrusts local government with the responsibility to safeguard and administer resources allocated for implementation of service delivery programs (Act No. 108 of 1996). The content of these policies such as providing water, sanitation, transportation facilities, electricity, primary health services, housing and security, within a safe and healthy environment, set forth tasks for municipalities with significant amount of authority in respect of implementation. Despite the fact that, within the legislative framework, provincial and national government outline the criteria by which capacity request for projects will be met

(support), local government has a fair amount of discretion in the implementation of programs. Municipalities use this discretion in and around the boundaries of available resources to secure commitment from higher spheres of government. When the rationale for commitment is articulated, it serves as a stimulus to build coherent world views out of whatever resources are at hand.

Though easier said than done, not least because of the allocation of specific functions to the different spheres of government by the Constitution itself, in cases where the principle of cooperative government in terms of Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations Act (Act No. 97 of 1997) has been given practical effect, municipalities have received support (including capabilities, skills, technical and financial assistance) to enable them “to plan properly, including in developing and revising their integrated development plans” (Municipal Finance Management Act No. 56 of 2003). Such cooperation fosters commitment at provincial and national level, exemplifies coalition-building, as well as impacts positively the implementation context by attenuating potential obstructions within and between different levels. Another incentive (increasing commitment) from provincial and national government is when policies (context) require municipalities to report progress in the implementation of programs pertaining to budgeting processes, efficient and effective systems of revenue management, accountability, and monitoring and evaluation standard mechanisms are adhered to.

To the extent that the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) regulates intergovernmental relations with the local sphere of government, compliance in terms of reporting to higher spheres of government, including submissions to the Auditor-General, is mandatory (or subject to enforcement) in spite of the 'distinctive, interdependent and interrelated' nature of inter-governmental relationship. Thus, municipalities do not entirely reserve the prerogative to implement or not to implement projects (discretion impacting commitment). If a municipality cannot or does not fulfil its obligations with regard to the provision of basic services, section 139 of the Constitution applies. Section 139 empowers the provincial government to intervene in the affairs of a municipality, including, among others, assuming the executive functions, dissolving a municipality and appointing an administrator. The consequences of this asymmetrical emphasis on compliance at the expense of discretion in the statute is highlighted by Elmore (1982, p.27): “when implementation consists essentially of controlling discretion, the effect is to reduce reliance on knowledge and skill at the delivery level and increase reliance on abstract, standardised solutions... adaptive behaviour

by street-level bureaucrats are never well understood by policymakers because they are viewed as illicit... [and] one's view of implementation has to put a higher value on discretion than compliance."

The discussion in this section shows that policy content, capacity and context come together to influence the commitment of actors in how local government implement service delivery policies. As an example, the interaction between context and commitment is highlighted by heightened attention occasioned by "service delivery protests" which may spur both national and provincial government's active interest in the affairs of a municipality (commitment) and increase public participation and support (visibility). Accountability mechanisms between local government and higher spheres of government bind macro- and micro-level actors to outcomes, but it makes their actions leading to these outcomes more visible, more volitional (policy content, context and capacity are negotiated), and more irrevocable (resources are irreversibly used up to generate consequences).

4.3.5 Links to clients and coalitions

Clients and coalitions cluster of variables identify key stakeholders with interests and strategies consonant or in conflict with those of decision makers and implementers. These players introduce heterogeneous patterns of interactions associated with sensemaking involving a diverse assortment of 'external' stakeholder across the implementation environment. Since stakeholders are sufficiently motivated and might command the resources and capabilities to enthusiastically pursue particular outcomes of the implementation process, their interests and strategies provide the material to elaborate on how their accounts of issues and actions are implicated in the social process of sensemaking. Key relevant stakeholders of focus, and not all identifiable stakeholders, include direct beneficiaries of policy (clients) and influential interest groups and individuals, opinion makers/leaders, and 'outside' actors who actively support or oppose a particular implementation process (coalitions).

The presence of powerful clients and coalitions who have varying expectations with regard to the implementation of programs gives rise to conditions in which the social processes of organisational sensemaking are both discernible and consequential. Tensions often inevitably arise among parties stemming from policy ambiguity or conflict in relation to policy goals, problem definition, means, methods or anticipated implementation outcomes. Such stakeholder-rich context contributes to the environmental complexity that creates "occasions for sensemaking" (Weick, 1995, p.87). It is in these dynamic and turbulent settings that

sensemaking processes are most critical owing to the importance of the necessity to construct and uphold mutual understandings in which relationships could be sustained and collective action enabled.

A common assumption in the literature on political decision-making and stakeholder theory suggests that implementation actors and other stakeholders will be inspired to seek to “influence issues in which they have vested interest” (Pettigrew, 1973; Mangham, 1986; Agle & Mitchell, 1999; in Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007, p.76). On the other hand, research on behavioural decision-making suggests that lower level actors and clients and coalitions become involved in issues lithely, often opting not to participate, even in matters that directly impact on their own interests (Pasmore & Fagan, 1992; March, 1994; Heller, 1998; in Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007, p.76). Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) reconcile these conflicting views by invoking the notion of “bounded responsibility” to help us understand conditions under which stakeholders are likely to be inspired to engage in efforts to endeavour to influence the sensemaking of others (sensegiving).

Drawing on a larger-scale comparative longitudinal study, the researchers found that “sometimes feelings of self-interest motivated stakeholders to engage in sensegiving but also sometimes feelings of responsibility or organisational stewardship motivate it” (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007, p.76). In addition to perception of an issue as having consequence to them, stakeholders are ‘bounded’ by feeling of responsibility towards a group whom they represent or an organisation at large as well as perception of leaders as lacking competencies in relation to an issue. The study also found that once stakeholders are motivated to influence sensemaking, conditions which enable them to engage in sensegiving are issue domains in which they possess issue-related expertise and legitimacy, and organisational processes (e.g., routines, practices and structure) provide them with the opportunities.

Patterns of interactions among clients and coalitions in relation to important topics that arise in the process of implementing policy provide us with the raw material to examine the social process of sensemaking and attempts made to influence its outcomes (sensegiving). Topics of discussion involve questions or concerns connected in some way with “the way in which stakeholders and leaders talk among themselves and to each other, how often different parties meet and under what circumstances, and rhythm of those interaction over time” (Maitlis, 2005, p.27). These engagements can be used to identify broader issues domains involving key players who attempt to influence the social process of sensemaking among diverse players

pursuing divergent interests in the implementation process. The nature and level of sensegiving behaviour by external stakeholder, implementing agents and top-level officials on particular issue domains include “statements or activities that involve providing plausible descriptions and explanations of extracted cues and constructing sensible environments for others” (Weick, 1995, in Maitlis, 2005, p.29)

High level engagements by top level officials in these interactions, occurring in an organised and logical fashion, rather than capricious, in formal meetings, formal committees, planned events, etc. lead to a “controlled sensemaking processes” (Maitlis, 2005, p.30). Maitlis’ empirical study found that sensemaking occur in this “controlled” way because officials draw on their official authority as mandated by policy content, display requisite knowledge of the issues, and stakeholders respond to sensegiving from above by participating in the availed opportunities to attempt to influence understanding of issues. Participating in organised rich personal media offer “access to more cues and more varied cues”, and allows each party to freely express their needs and interests, which also enable them to adjust and refine their accounts of issues (Weick, 1995, p.99). Clients, who might otherwise not presume benefits from policy, and therefore be inclined to withhold commitment and support, are afforded an opportunity to provide description and explanations of issues, which often lead to mutually acceptable clarification of concerns and questions.

For internal and external actors to engage in sensegiving, they need to: first, draw on applicable expertise to tell sensible stories; second, engage in such behaviour at the appropriate time and place; and third, occupy a social position that provides an acceptable basis from which to engage and that leads others to listen (legitimacy) (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007,p.68). The extent to which key players consider an issue as important might affect the degree of sensegiving both engage in and consequently may affect the resulting form of organisational sensemaking. Maitlis’ (2005) study demonstrates how the social process of the sensemaking process connects to different types of accounts and actions, but only speculates on the relationships between particular forms of organisational sensemaking and important performance-related outcomes, such as innovation, efficiency and financial performance. The linkage between effective action and successful organisational performance is a fundamental presumption in strategic management literature. In the context of this study, action is defined as any significant change in the behaviour of clients targeted by implementation activities, revision in or adaptability of overall strategy to achieve policy objectives, and the redesign of organisational practices such as a substantive adaptations required in delivering services.

4.4 Conclusion

Review of literature shows that policy implementation is inherently a puzzling terrain because it lends itself to multiple and conflicting interpretations, all of which are plausible. What implementation actions actually mean for multiple actors is seldom self-evident. The identification of any given action is subject to infinite revision because events occur in a continually emerging context that changes meanings of earlier events. The meaning of actions and events is determined by context, and since context is infinitely expandable into the past and the future, it is not always clear which contextual indicators can be relied on amongst actors. Whilst different actors at different levels will define the same situation in different ways, that the implementation environment is a shared environment which give rise to an outlook that is itself shared cannot be ignored.

Policy content, from a sensemaking perspective, expresses generic meanings that are formulated at an extra-subjective level, subsequently communicated, interpreted, shared, and acted on at a social interaction level in the implementation process. Put differently, policy content defines the playing field, the principles and parameters for implementation and the role of implementing actors in this process. Implementation gaps, in this context, are attributable to the inherent tensions between the rigid nature of social structure and social interaction at intersubjective level. The former seeks to preserve coherence across an organisation and long term stability, while the latter is recurrently created, cultivating creative and innovative options of organising and working, with the attended risk of precipitating unpredictability and disintegration.

Context affects the content of acceptable justifications and the choice of features of the environment that support the rationalising. Since policy implementation is often unclear about goals, problem definition and methods, justifications became a reality in many implementation settings. To make sense of this equivocality, commitment binds organisational actors to their actions in which behaviours are rationalised by referring to features of the implementation environment which support it. Such sensemaking also occurs in a social context in which norms and expectations affect the rationalisation developed for behaviours. People develop acceptable justifications for their behaviour in order to make such behaviours meaningful and reasonable (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978, in Weick, 1979, p.17). As part of the process of legitimating behaviours associated with the implementation process,

elaborate and persuasive set of justification are thus developed to facilitate actors' participation, the deployment of resources, and the rationale for client and coalitions.

Instead of focusing on conventional institutional theory that have concentrated on the diffusion of particular policies and practices, examining behaviours and decision-making process that underwrite such diffusion require us to look more closely at the role institutional context plays in sensemaking. A traditional view of institutions as cultural cognitive constraints is expanded upon in this chapter to suggest that institutions are intricately interwoven into sensemaking. Building upon Giddens' (1984) notion of duality of structure and drawing from Weber and Glynn's (2006) work, organisational structure and, broadly, institutional context are foregrounded and implicated in implementation sensemaking activities, thereby embedding cluster of variables in implementation agencies' organisational social dynamics. This approach is based on the notion that whilst inherent institutional ambiguities trigger sensemaking, to maintain stability of institutionalised order and its roles, institutions provide dynamic foci that demand continued attention which require an ongoing sensemaking process.

The utility of analysis of service delivery policies within the '5Cs' protocol model through a sensemaking framework lens does not only help us acquire a deeper understanding of the implementation environment and actors' patterns of interactions, but is brought to bear in finding new ways that reveal possibilities for novel choices and actions based on that understanding. Sensemaking theoretical concepts foreground underlying social processes through which individual actors across all levels create and sustain reality as an ongoing accomplishment which takes particular forms and shapes. Examination of the five critical variables and their interaction provide the foundation to build a case for why sensemaking analysis of the implementation process is significant in helping us identify and understand important factors detracting from, and contributing to, implementation.

Fairly fundamental is the disconnection potentially present between variables, which also highlight various critical aspects contributing to implementation gap. Whereas each case of implementation may be unique, analysis of the interaction of clusters of variables illuminates the significance in implementation of policy content, capacity and context as key variables affecting the commitment of all stakeholders, and eventually the magnitude and effectiveness of implementation. For policy to bring about substantial change in the behaviour of implementing agencies, agents and clients, as mandated in policy content, it is essential to

ensure that sufficient capacity is catered for in policy content, and that connections are made to, or resources mobilised from, contextual factors. Paying advanced attention in the policy formulation stage to the idea that commitment and clients and coalitions rely heavily on policy content, capacity and context will increase the probability that, at the least, incremental progress towards implementation can happen.

By referring to the four levels of sensemaking processes of social reality in daily organisational life, sensemaking perspectives of knowledge in organisations shed light on the nature of knowledge at each level and how it is repeatedly (re-) created, integrated, diffused, shared, and disputed between levels. Implementation capacity does not only refer to drawing resources from contextual factors, but includes strong organisational processes and strategies aimed at continuously integrating resources through a knowledge-based approach that enable an implementing agency to develop and renew organisational capabilities. While a resource-based view focuses only on administrative capacity, a knowledge-based view explores mechanism by which organisations create, acquire and maintain skills and knowledge capabilities in order to address knowledge requirements based on operational and functional considerations. By looking at key elements of implementation from a knowledge management perspective, we can weave together three connected process of knowledge creation, sensemaking and decision making to examine whether implementing agencies have the ability to manoeuvre with intelligence and creativity.

Another notable potential weakness is the extent of the connection primarily between policy context (e.g. organisational structure) and content which consequently impact on capacity, commitment and stakeholders. As an example, a link between content and context could be affected by misalignment of policy with existing legislative provisions as mandated in different spheres of government (legislative structure). A related issue is that the redistributive nature of service delivery policies to address widespread historic imbalances in South Africa requires rearranging of priorities which inevitably tend to threaten the status quo. As a result, implementation of programs which are perceived as impacting negatively on the status quo might generate strong resistances from powerful coalitions. Furthermore, the allocation of funds for service delivery programs by upper spheres of government does not always reflect commitment to local priorities. On the other hand, municipalities might lack requisite capacity to spend allocated funds on priority projects as required by provincial or national government.

The strength of the link between policy content, context and the interaction of both internal and external stakeholders is informed by how policy is framed, viewed, understood and enacted at each level of the implementation process. What actors do at each level is contingent upon and the result of the meanings they construct of the situations in which they are required to act. The degree to which there is connection or disconnection of how policy is framed at different levels and the relationship between different framing account for varying pace, direction and impact, and ultimately, the degree of its success or failure. Examining how policy is framed at macro-, meso and micro level of implementation focuses on the defining characteristic of policy content relevant to each level, the rationale or justification or purpose invoked at one level and means by which implementation is presented at each level.

To overcome different frames of references or clarify ambiguous issues related to commitment, capacity, actors and other stakeholders' participation, richer qualitative information, and not larger quantities of information, is needed. Information richness refers to communication transactions that have the ability to change understanding within a time interval, and pertains to the learning capacity of communication. An interest in sensemaking in organisations increases the recognition of the organisations' openness to and communication with the environment, viewing organisations as a looser rather than a tighter coupling among its elements, and emphasising process rather than structure. As example, Smircich and Stubbart (1985, in Weick, 1995) define organisation as a "set of people who share many beliefs, values, and assumptions that encourage them to make mutually-reinforcing interpretations" of situations.

Maitlis' (2005) empirical study is drawn upon to explore how varying degrees of sensemaking and sensegiving can lead to "differential sensemaking outcomes" – guided, fragmented, restricted and minimal. Key insight from Maitlis' findings is that merely facilitating opportunities for sensegiving is not sufficient to ensure that sensemaking which facilitate effective social interaction does occurs. As an example, the study demonstrates that animated sensegiving by top officials can lead to restricted sensemaking outcomes when met with too little sensegiving by actors at the lower level and clients and coalitions. The study provides us with the analytical tools to examine essential strategies that can ostensibly facilitate sensemaking and sensegiving techniques in areas such as robust policy design, engaging leadership, senior officials support for staff, commitment, and taking action. Effective sensemaking and sensegiving can help provide avenues to help actors and stakeholders meaningfully construct and rethink extant understanding of organisational

processes and strategies through information flows and widespread conversations across implementing teams.

The quality of sensemaking and sensegiving processes in the early stages of, or preceding, implementation should be aimed at mobilisation and transformational change that alter the culture of institutions, especially in policies that encounter contextual obstacles such as cutting across several public sectors. These entail shifting underlying assumption of institutional behaviours and processes in order to ensure that incremental progress occurs over time in the implementation process. The primary objective in the early phase is to generate enthusiasm and develop critical mass of support for policy objectives. In the later stages of implementation of projects, sensemaking needs to be deeper to help implementing agents and stakeholders transcend superficial support to active engagement. At this stage the objective is to shift understanding of the main issues that are likely to play out over time from abstract understanding to linking them with potential barriers (implementation gaps) through facilitation. Sensegiving efforts should focus on providing support and assuaging barriers to avoid stalling and move forward.

For progress in implementation initiatives to be realised, sensemaking and sensegiving processes at all levels of an institution and implementing agencies must unfold in phases similar to findings in empirical studies. According Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), three key components of sensemaking and sensegiving which are likely to move an organisation to successful implementation are: a) depth of process, sensemaking and sensegiving becoming entrenched within implementing agents' consciousness and more tangible over time at later stages of implementation; b) breadth of engagement across the organisation, having people at each level reconsider their tasks and persuading others to equally rethink their understanding of issues; and, c) a connection between strategies and obstacles, the implementer must see and make a link that connects sensemaking/sensegiving, broader policy intention and specific barriers encountered with the strategies they are trying to employ. Sensemaking is not only about understanding the implementation process and making it meaningful to actors and stakeholders, the process of constructing meanings can also augment the use of implementation strategies.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

Extant policy implementation studies have put forward rich insights that focus our attention on hitherto under-explored facets of the implementation process. However, in relating policy designs to the characteristics of the implementation process, existing theories of implementation are not sufficiently developed to provide valid knowledge about underlying features of a policy process that are likely to yield successful outcomes. The processes by which micro-implementing agents come to understand implementation and the impact or outcome of that understanding is seldom explored in conventional models. The process by which implementing agents and agencies construct or attribute meanings to policy messages should be conceived as an “unfolding temporal sequences that may have identifiable markers with clear beginnings and endings and benchmarks in between” (Charmaz, 2006, p.10).

Implementation researchers tend to proffer arguments based on rational choice and principal-agent problem theories to explain the relationships between policy formulation, intra- intra- and inter-organisational structures of governance, capacity, disposition of actors and the nature of social challenges surrounding implementation. Consistent with rational choice theory, decisions made by policy designers and implementing agents are primarily “motivated by self-interest; hence appropriate incentives and monitoring systems are essential if principals are to have their way” (Spillane et al., 2002, p.390). According to Spillane et al. (2002), individual preferences are not considered to be vague or contradictory such that “there is not interaction among individuals’ choices or preferences”.

Given that many policies are informed by statutes that are often vague, ambiguous, unspecific, and contradictory, they often offer indefinite implementation direction. Lipsky (1980), among other scholars, argues that analysis of the implementation process should focus on the behaviour of implementing agents, and continue to examine the structural, social and individual factors which impact on their behaviour. Thus, by revealing and highlighting the interpretive or sensemaking dimension of the implementation process, this research turns the spotlight on the necessity to be heedful of, and to unravel, the implementing agents' sensemaking from policy; instead of relying on the analysis of conventional accounts, which often portray implementing agencies' interpretation or ‘misinterpretation’ of policy provisions as wilful efforts by grass roots actors to subvert policy intention or rationalise policy modification.

Whilst not discounting the possibility of purposeful misinterpretation of policy, the role of organisational sensemaking in implementation underscores and reveals the importance of inadvertent failings of programs. The sensemaking framework complicates ideas concerning the commitment of implementing agents by looking beyond the question whether street-level bureaucrats are incentivised or sanctioned. While policy analysts recognise that inducing the commitment of grass roots implementers is easier said than done, early research focused on the mobilisation of resources as tools for inducements and sanctions. Arguments presented in this thesis illuminate the importance of the link between the commitment of the grass roots implementers and their understanding of policy ideas. The argument made in this study is that policy ideas work as levers to solicit the commitment of field workers only if the designers of policy convince them to rethink their behaviour; thus encouraging them to question more closely manifest behaviour that will, in turn, prompt them to creatively invent alternate means of carrying out tasks.

For some policies, significant change in prevailing behaviour is required, while for others less. When it comes to policy implementation, the differences are consequential. Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983, p.541) noted earlier on that implementation is influenced by “the tractability of the problem(s)” that a policy is designed to resolve, which amongst others entail: “diversity of target group behaviour... [and] the extent of behavioural change required.” Without suggesting that implementation agencies and implementation agents ought not to implement policy according to the national and provincial policy designers’ directives because they are impracticable in local settings, they must foremost understand, however, what it is being requested of them. Sensemaking concepts provide the analytical tools to test our assumptions about implementation - not unwittingly replicating these assumptions by allowing us to discover what implementation agents take for granted, or do not say.

In explaining the influences on implementation, a sensemaking framework enables us to untangle the mechanisms by which implementing agents understand and perform crucial features of policy and hence take steps to connect that understanding with actions. By taking a multidisciplinary approach, this research seeks to demonstrate that an exclusive model for designing efficient policies does not exist; rather, smart policy content is regarded as commensurate with the local conditions that, in the first place, gave rise to the need for policy. In weaving together elements of sensemaking framework, institutional theory and knowledge management to conceptualise and examine the characteristics of the process of policy design and implementation, it opens up a promising dimension that can be especially

important in the public sector—as it would for implementation in general. This approach has taken the view that the impact of policy content on actual implementation should be empirically assessed by examining the extent to which grassroots actors are involved in and add value to the policy design.

5.2 Further Discussion

5.2.1 Understanding the interface of implementation variables through sensemaking

A common thread running through efforts to refine conceptual generalisations, based on an analytical frameworks to integrate and synthesise contending implementation perspectives, as presented in the Najam and Matland’ models, is that tentative connections are sought between the types of policy that are being studied, and identification is made of variables of significance. The strength, therefore, of understanding implementation as constructs of interaction between pressures from the top and from the bottom is that it rejects a false dichotomy between strict conceptualisations of divergent views, and embraces the strengths of both perspectives. This gives rise to a view of implementation as a dynamic process, which is not restricted only to translating a state policy intention into action, but may well transform the policy itself.

Using a methodological framework to systematically identify and analyse factors that are critical in the implementation process can serve to foster the advancement of the current state of knowledge and refine conceptual generalisation about the policy process as well as explain relative implementation success or failure in a given policy issue area. In accordance with our intention to contribute to the multidisciplinary approach in implementation research, the preceding chapter assessed the utility of Najam’s conceptual model by analysing each of the five components of the ‘5Cs’ Protocol framework, using sensemaking concepts in order to identify, examine and contextualise significant underlying social dimensions that may detract from, or contribute to, implementation. Foremost, and fairly fundamental in our view, a sensemaking analysis of critical variables deepens and extends Najam’s assertion about the importance of grouping and connecting implementation variables and allowing them to be analysed in relation to each other to help identify and provide an explanation of incidences of an ‘implementation gap’.

Although identifying and analysing critical variables, and other factors, may be arrived at theoretically and empirically, the ‘5Cs’ Protocol framework, like other implementation models, relies largely on rational calculations of efficiency that promote single-loop learning.

An alternative strategy is a double-loop learning strategy that is accomplished through reflection. Mischen and Sinclair (2007, p.152) refer to such reflection as a “process of being explicit about goals, values, and assumptions underlying actions.” Sensemaking approaches in policy implementation seek to bring together reflection and action, practice and theory, in the pursuit of pragmatic solutions to issues of pressing concern for organisational actors, client and coalitions, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and target communities. A sensemaking framework challenges a positivist approach to implementation by looking at organisational actors not only as solvers of problems but also problem setters. From a sensemaking perspective, problem setting is a process in which, “interactively, we ‘name’ the things to which we will attend and ‘frame’ the context in which we will attend to them” (Weick, 1995, p.9).

The relationship among cognition, action, and outcomes suggests that “sensemaking is the medium for strategic organisational reform” (Thomas et al., 1993). This view is expanded to suggest the links between strategic sensemaking and organizational performance (Maitlis, 2005). Organisational sensemaking, as fundamentally a process of social construction, which happens through discursive construction of reality that interprets or explains, invites implementers to engage in talks that could lead to better policy outcomes. It does so, for example, at a level where such interaction may be more genuine than that between a national politician and a resident of an informal settlement. The interactions among street-level bureaucrats and clients happen through the production of accounts, or activation of existing accounts, and thus serve as an alternative to revealing individual preferences in ways that interest group politics and mass political action cannot.

A sensemaking inquiry allows information to be more particularised and nuanced so that questions and answers, problems and solutions, can be explored and reframed in depth to allow individuals to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity by creating rational accounts that enable action, rather than a situation where problems and solutions are refined down to simple and often dichotomous alternatives. As a process that is key to the construction of organisational accounts and actions, sensemaking enables us to examine variances that exist among a population of diverse actors dealing with a range of organisational issues.

Mechanisms for sensemaking also encourage implementing agencies and agents to adopt policies that are consonant with the specific context of particular groups or communities, in part because they are able to find out what those contexts are, and in part because they are

propitiously positioned to adapt policy positions and actions to them. Additionally, when implementers and target groups have a vested interest in a policy process that legitimately involves them at key levels of implementation, they are more likely to see outcomes as legitimate and adjust their behaviour accordingly. A nuanced alternative approach to instantiate policy intentions has to consider the elements of policy over which implementing agents exercise discretion to examine the value added to implementation by the structural aspects of policy content (e.g. agents, target population, objective).

For our purposes, sensemaking allows us to unpack the notion of discretion by demonstrating how coping mechanisms are acquired, based on the interplay between policies which attempt to direct local action and the ways in which the meaning of that direction is constructed by micro-level actors. Additionally, new institutionalism and knowledge management theories provide the conceptual tools to broaden and deepen the examination of the behaviour of implementing agents as a function of the interaction of policy content and the conditions in which they attempt to make sense of policy, based on their knowledge, beliefs and experiences.

These constitutive elements of policy are connected to each other by assumptions or theories underlying policy, rules and policy tools. Such an approach should focus on a value-added perspective to help attenuate the different views on the criteria or measurement of effective implementation.

The take-away from the sensemaking literature, as reviewed in the preceding chapters, is that field workers would need to understand policy change as consistent with the larger mission of service delivery programmes and to believe policymaking principals are committed to bringing about this change. To underscore this point, Weick (1995) writes that organisations are social constructions that various actors constantly create and re-create as they make meaning of their activities and roles. For field workers to fully exercise discretion, show commitment, and effect policy changes that will produce desired implementation outcomes, they need to be cognisant of the espoused meaning of policy. Moreover, if street level bureaucrats integrate new policy into existing practices in an artificial manner, the hope for real change will not flourish, but flounder.

The mere invocation of politically-correct rhetoric and sentiments in an attempt to foster or elicit support for policy is not sufficient; knowing how and what actors at the lower level think about policy is consequential. Valuable experience and insights will be gained if leaders

were to appreciate the impact of sensemaking on the policy process. This will effectively create a coherent policy environment in which all actors, at various levels of the implementation process, will be able to develop a collective understanding and work towards improving opportunities for successful implementation.

5.3 Conclusion

5.3.1 Implications for public sector

In South Africa, the organisational arrangements and political dynamics of the three spheres of government tend to adduce highly symbolic policies with ambiguous and vague goals, and inconsistent cues, which, it can be argued, have hindered effective implementation. The federal character of the political system is marked by the separation of authority and power that contributes to policy uncertainty and inconsistencies and gives rise to conditions under which implementation is made increasingly difficult. Several impediments stand in the way of producing causal theories and recommendations for how to frame policy and advance implementation within a public sector milieu, characterised, as it is, by numerous dispersed points of authority and power. There often is a dearth of commonality in the conception of substantive policy content that captures essential elements of the policy process across different spheres of government, which has brought about a negative influence on implementation outcomes. As a result, implementation agencies and agents in various spheres of government are able to impede the intent of policies in many policy situations in which capacity, support, knowledge, discretion, and the motivation of implementers will vary from one policy element to another.

Despite many new policies and significant policy changes induced by the national and provincial governments to improve and accelerate the delivery of service in South Africa, there is agreement that a corresponding change in behaviour at the frontline of service delivery program implementation is not in evidence. Studies reviewed in this thesis suggest that administrative desires cannot always be translated into frontline action. Neither can congruence between formal policy goals, implementing agency priorities, and the operative goals of agency managers and frontline workers be assumed. This is the result of the social processes occurring at the micro-level. Managers must be able to draw on systems theories and theories of organisational learning to effect change in the public sector. Instead of being overly concerned only with accountability to provincial- and national-level political principals, accountability to local needs requires a high level of confidence in the ability of

local officials to bring together local values, organisational capacity, experience, insight and knowledge to solve problems.

One of the attempts to safeguard effective implementation in the public sector tends to overemphasise accountability to higher levels of government by implementing agencies as an indicator of effective implementation. Regardless of the effect of consequences on target groups and the general public, an implementing agency will see the fact of simply meeting predefined accountability standards as having carried out its task properly, and thus to have done its duty. The working assumption here is that reference to accountability is enough to hold bureaucrats in check; and furthermore, that notions of accountability have a motivating effect on implementing agencies and agents, as well as are set up as a professional standard to keep everyone in line with the policy. As a result, bureaucrats are encouraged to stay away from potentially contentious policy issues. What tends to be overlooked, though, is the evidence that implementation agencies may pursue bureaucratic interests contrary to explicit policy goals, as they inject their own policy consideration into the implementation process. The approach stems in part from a preference for quantifiable goals, which overlooks the fact that many expansive goals do not lend themselves to concrete specificity. Even when consequential goals are quantified, policy goals often have other related objectives, some of which are inspirational or normative in character.

Conceptualising the policy process with a view to account for the relationship among the framers of policy, implementation and consequence can help us overcome the challenge of developing policy for a specific purpose, rather than relating the variations in policy design to variation in implementation. For example, politicians often present policy output in the form of either promulgating policy or quantifying the amount of money to be spent on implementation. As the analysis of the interactions of critical variables of implementation has shown, there are many other elements of policy at play required to understand the behaviour of implementation actors, in addition to expenditure as an important part of policy capacity. Of the many policy instruments, elevating expenditure as the primary determinant of policy outcomes undermines the dynamic view of the connections between variables, which is of paramount importance to achieve the policy objective of conferring benefits to target groups of service delivery programs.

When legislation which instigates or undergirds policy is widely used as an indicator of policy output, it heralds the analogous hurdle of disguising inherent contradictions in policies,

and endorses the assumption that implementing agencies are inconsequential in the conception of policy content – they are only expected to apply routinely the rules outlined in the statutes. The public sector tends to give singular attention to structures of service delivery systems; that is, organisational arrangements and agencies sanctioned in law to implement policies.

Other aspects of the developing policy content, as elaborated on in the preceding chapters, have received scant attention. As a result, policy consequences tend to be theorised as being attributable to the shortcomings of implementers and resources. Furthermore, many of the traditional tenets of public administration, hierarchical structure, bureaucratic culture, aversion to duplication of service centres and centralisation are cited as being inconsistent with the natural inclinations of human behaviour, and commonly inimical to the realisation of expected policy objectives.

Weick (1995, p.160) writes that traditional bureaucracy “makes less sense” because participants in it “inherit explanations of what they are doing rather than construct them occasionally”; and although inherited explanations are laced with meanings, “the meanings that are available tend to be out of date.” Further, he argues that tradition, centralisation and formalisation reduce the occasion for choice, which results in fewer opportunities to take committing actions and also fewer opportunities to build more current understanding in the form of justifications tailored for new actions.

The advice implicit in the analysis of implementation using sensemaking concepts is that behavioural, normative and technical assumptions cannot only be spelled out by political forces at higher spheres of government, because “successful policy implementation at the local level is determined by the synergism produced through many factors coming together in patterns unique to local circumstances” (Ingram & Schneider, 1990, p.79).

Provincial and national authorities often implore local implementing agencies and agents to alter their behaviour and “do things differently.” The application of sensemaking concepts to implementation activities accentuates behavioural changes on the part of individuals. It seeks to contribute to our understanding by unpacking how implementing agents construct ideas from provincial and national policy messaging. Implementation agents respond by acting according to the instruction they construe from these messages. In situations where implementers misapprehend or misinterpret policy designers' intentions, implementation failure is probable. The stumbling of implementation efforts in this instance emanates not

from antipathy towards policy imperatives coming from the top, but because policy messages are understood differently.

While structures of service delivery systems are significant, they need to be considered together with other elements of policy content, such as the envisaged goals and the tools preferred for the motivation of implementing agents and target communities in order to act in concert with goals. Policy tools, as techniques that could be employed to boost the likelihood that target groups and implementers will take actions that are consistent with desired policy outcomes provide us “with an objective, an empirical referent for measuring important characteristics of implementation” (Ingram and Schneider, 1990, p.69). Drawing from multiple disciplines and varying traditions, including sensemaking, knowledge management, action research, public choice and implementation research, effective implementation may not necessarily follow consistently the proposition of any of the implementation schools of thought considered previously in this thesis. Rather, creating a framework for exploring policy tools in the process of developing policy, along with other aspects of policy content enable us to explore how the allocation of discretion to implementing actors increases the possibility of putting policy proposals into practice.

Examination of different elements in policy content, such as targets, rules, assumptions and goals, calls for a consideration of the discretion of micro-level actors over these policy instruments. As an example, discretion can possibly be yielded to a local official over some tools, but denied over others, for instance rules or targets. In a number of policy situations, motivation, capacity, support, and knowledge of local actors will be different from one policy element to another. Through allocation of discretion, depending on the context, street-level bureaucrats could be encouraged to mobilise support for policy goals, to increase dissemination of information required to mitigate emerging problems, and, through provision of resources, motivate target communities to participate in actions which will fulfil policy objectives. The implication of the foregoing notion is that discretion should be allocated to actors at those levels most likely to demonstrate resultant value-add.

In a similar way that blueprints for architectural design range from comprehensive or detailed building instructions or minimal guidelines for people engaged in construction, policy design may provide ample room for choice or restrict discretion to implementing agents in relation to important characteristics of implementation. For instance, statutes may merely authorise actors at the top to create an action plan to satisfy an overall purpose, but the choice of policy

instruments is left to primary implementing agents, or delegated to the service-deliverers. On the other hand, statutes, may directly seek to influence the behaviours and decisions of service delivery target communities, whose reaction and cooperation impact upon implementation effectiveness. This implies that by probing how discretion has been altered, removed from or added to the basic policy design blueprint; and by observing and measuring the value added to the process, an analysis of the implementation process can be enhanced. Additionally, the kind of discretion allowed in policy content encourages binding commitment which impacts upon effective implementation.

5.3.2 Implications in general for implementation

Existing theories relating policy designs to constitutive features of the implementation process are either not adequately developed, or proffer distinctively divergent views about the characteristics of a policy process likely to yield further effective implementation outcomes. There remains a difference of opinion about whether the measure of implementation success should be defined in terms of accountability, or in terms of submission to higher authority (or statutes). By considering aspects of implementation over which field workers exercise discretion, it can provide a nuanced conceptualisation of a policy process, that examines the value added to implementation by the structural aspects of policy content (e.g. agents, target population, policy objective). Such structural elements are weaved together by assumptions, theories, rules or tools underlying policy. A focus on the mechanisms for finding a value-adding approach raises the possibility of an alternative explanation, as indicated by theorists' disagreements on the criteria for the assessment of an implementation's success.

Attempts at synthesising the traditional top-down and bottom-up divide are motivated by a normative theory which seeks to balance top-down accountability and bottom-up responsiveness. The proposition that implementing agents and target groups can work together to alter and enrich policy as a reaction to local conditions, is at odds with the contention by some scholars that grass roots implementation disproportionately extends the responsibility and roles of street-level bureaucrats further than those of statutory principals, who have the legislative authority of setting policy. Furthermore, the critics of such an approach, which promotes the ability of local players to mobilise knowledge, capacity, support and local values to solve problems, argue that adopting it may aggravate the "principal-agents problem", for it will give to implementing agencies, contrary to the

mandate set by the legislative authority, the justification and means to derail policy objectives.

Based on the principle of democratic theory, acquiescing to a constitutional legislative authority is a sensible approach. However, the fact remains that implementation research has shown that many policies are purposively written ambiguously, “not just because clarity is impossible to achieve, but because ambiguity provides the maximum leeway to local level implementers, permitting them to adapt the statute to local needs” (Ingram & Schneider, 1990, p.79), and in part to reduce potential conflict among the diverse groups of stakeholders. It is easier to make a normative argument that implementation should be democratic, but not as simple to translate the sentiment into actual practice. Since the application of democratic principles to the theory and practice of implementation necessitates perceptive insight into the contingencies that determine a choice of strategy, the optimal balance between the two main contending perspectives of implementation should be context dependent. To match policy designs to implementation context, the analysis of implementation should examine the magnitude of value added when compared to the extent of discretion exercised by implementers. A value-added approach is aimed at seeking an optimal, rather than the best resolution to the principal-agent conundrum.

It may be necessary to eschew the habit of simply documenting perfunctorily the evolution of policy during the course of implementation, such as in service delivery programs for example, in order for implementation scholarship to produce profoundly formative insights in the design of policy. Strategies that can engender important insights to inform implementation include employing interpretative and integrative frameworks to unpack how and why policy changes as it does. This thesis has adopted an interpretative approach, taking into account the social context of the human world, in an attempt to shine light on how human sensemaking can contribute to the ongoing study of the implementation process. This approach makes it possible to identify and analyse underlying salient elements of the policy process and explain the mechanisms by which street-level bureaucrats and implementation agencies construct meaning. The process by which implementing agents understand policy is not a simple translating of policy content; rather, it is an active process of interpretation that draws on the individual's rich knowledge base, a complex of understandings, beliefs, and attitudes. By taking into account how understanding is formed from the implementing agents' sensemaking, permeating the implementation process and making the policy elements manifest in a logic of its own, giving us a glimpse, an hypothesis, of the manner in which

such a policy might evolve. A sensemaking process does not simply end with an explication of the finite meanings that implementers construct, rather, it continues to reveal patterns brought forth by the progressively deeper understanding of the process reached in the minds of the implementing agents.

It seldom happens that a new implementation agency is formed solely for the purpose of implementing a particular policy. Instead, existing agencies are expected to be flexible and take on newly given tasks, executing them adaptively as ‘new policies’. These attempts are often meant to improve the implementation effectiveness of prevailing policies. Since patterns of behaviour become institutionalised and re-institutionalised, how implementation agents make sense of these ‘new policies’ or policy changes, and make decisions around them, is ultimately influenced by assumptions stemming from past experiences from knowledge that has been created. Mischen and Sinclair (2007, p.152) specifically make the connection between contemporary behaviour and past experience thus: “learning often starts with assumptions that are relics of past policies.” It is from this accumulated repertoire of experience and knowledge that grass roots actors construct the understanding of what a policy comes to mean.

Sensemaking enables agents to adapt their thoughts and behaviours to cope with ‘new policies’ or policy change by focusing attention on significant cues in the environment – including the ‘what’ of policy which only begins with policy ideas and goals, as explicated in policy documents. The interaction of grass roots actors’ cognitive schemes such as beliefs, attitude, experience and knowledge with policy cues as well as the implementation setting constitute the meaning of the ‘what’ of policy to them. Policy signals, as communicated to implementers, are not in the form of a static or passive notion conveyed unadulterated into the unquestioning agents’ minds - to be accepted, or modified, or rejected in accordance with local needs and circumstances. Rather, agents actively and interactively notice and pay attention, then frame and interpret, and finally construct the meaning of messages contained in the policy.

Sensemaking allows us to focus attention on the mechanisms by which implementation agents construct the meaning of policy and reflect on their own behaviour. It enables us to discover and explain how they engage policy in a manner that can lead to - or not - a resulting change in how they view their own actions, potentially leading to improvements in both behaviour and understanding. All actors at all levels of organizations engage in sensemaking.

However, the sensemaking of implementing agents, or frontline/field actors, or street level bureaucrats, is critical to policy outcomes, because it is at the local level that policies are enacted and services delivered. Knowing more about the sensemaking process of implementing actors can help us explain how the gaps between the spirit of policy and actual practice are created, and also discover opportunities and shed light on possible measures to help narrow the implementation gap.

Studies in the sensemaking process of implementing agents suggest that they exercise discretion in relation to policy enactment, policy adaptation or recreation and policy outcomes. Explicitly, “unpacking the notion of discretion as currently understood in policy analysis, we add a cognitive dimension that demonstrates how discretion acquires content that is based on the interplay between the policies that attempt to direct local action, and the ways in which that direction is constructed by locals” (Spillane et al., 2002, p.388). At the same time, policy designers’ intentions, or the spirit of the policy, is consequential even if it is often vague, lacks clarity and is not always specific. Policy texts represent ideas about ‘new policy’ or policy change activities and we need to analyse the behaviours, actions and accounts of grass roots actors to assess whether that policy is understood as envisioned. Taking this approach does not preclude but rather embraces the possibility of varied interpretations and understandings of a single policy by different players at a local level. Likewise, it does not exclude the reality that a policy proposal can be equivocal, oftentimes it may translate policy intent differently, or that the differences may embody multiple intentions.

While often blamed for implementation failure, policy ambiguity can be useful. Without imbuing it with any normative value, ambiguity can ease agreement both at the legitimization and formulation stage; it can provide an opportunity to learn new methods, technologies, and goals; and it should be seen as an inherent characteristic of policy (Matland, 1995). Vague and ambiguous policy may in reality be a virtue, not just because precision, or unequivocally, are difficult to accomplish, but because ambiguity provides implementation agents with maximum flexibility to adapt policy provisions to local settings. According to Ingram and Schneider (1990, p.79), “‘good implementation’ often comes out of mutual adaptation and learning at grassroots level.” Weick (1993, p.15) proposes that to reduce endemic ambiguity, implementation agents do not need more information; instead, they need richer qualitative information, which is the ability of information to change understanding within a period of time.

As we have attempted to show, the sensemaking concepts elaborated in this research are especially relevant for the analysis of policy implementation. Successful implementation will require implementing agents to adapt their meaning making postures and disposition. The process by which grass roots actors embrace, or adapt, or ignore, or frustrate implementation impels us to make their meaning making problematic in order to render an analysis of it. The analysis should be able to detect some localised understanding of policy signals that are either well-matched or mismatched with respect to the respective policy intentions. The degree to which implementers construct an understanding that resonates with core policy objectives is a necessary, if not sufficient condition, for effective implementation. They may inadvertently or wilfully misinterpret, overlook or adapt policy messages to advance their own agendas. Of course, even if they construct an understanding that accords with policy intent, they may not possess the necessary capacity to put that understanding into practice. That is, they may lack the necessary material and human capital to do what they understand the policy to be asking of them.

By adopting a multidisciplinary integrative approach, this research foreground additional analytical tools in order to make transparent underlying dynamic complexities of the process, and to identify a set of constructs and the relations among these constructs. This allows for the development of more comprehensive explanations that can be used to understand the implementation gap, or whether failure of implementation demonstrates purposive actions by implementing agents to thwart policy intention. A complementary point here is to underscore that policy implementation is not linear.

An integrative approach, as adopted in this thesis, draws upon concepts from sensemaking, new institutional theory and knowledge management to analyse critical variables of implementation and their interactions, is not meant to displace more conventional models. Rather, it supplements existing insights by making transparent those aspects of the process that have not been sufficiently and systematically employed in the implementation literature. It is a novel approach that seeks to deepen and expand our understanding of the essential mechanisms that give rise to the evolving behaviours attributable to implementation failure or success.

5.4 Future research

O'Toole's (1986) comprehensive reviews of policy implementation literature concluded that studies of implementation fulfil an important task of identifying factors affecting the

implementation process, but they are also incomplete in that they frequently fail to produce comprehensive integrative models. A follow up review of the state of research 14 years later by the same author found that many studies in the field do not go anymore by the title ‘implementation research’; rather, they have been transformed and are informed by other disciplines: institutional analysis, network analysis, management theory and the studies of governance. Beyond the era of a quest for a “single theory of implementation - an effort that got mired in top-down, bottom debate” (Mischen, 2007, p.554), now multiple approaches coexist in implementation research and theory to explain various issues (O’Toole, 2000). Although O’Toole’s focus remains on large-n quantitative studies, he acknowledges the importance of incorporating interpretative methodologies into the analysis of the policy process.

Studies of implementation are increasingly being found in journals outside of public administration or political science, such as health, education, welfare reform, environment, budgeted reform and economics (Saetren, 2005; Mischen, 2007). In addition to branching out into other fields, implementation research is merging with other theoretical approaches as is evidenced by the emphasis on intra-organisational concepts, such as organisational culture, knowledge creation, organisational learning, communication (Choo, 1998; Mischen, 2007) and the affordance of cognitive frameworks in the implementation process (Spillane et al., 2002). For example, Mischen (2007, p.315) cites work by several authors who make “important connections” between policy implementation and knowledge management (crucial for effective implementation), network analysis (as a tool of examining relationships between individuals and organisations in social networks) and complexity theory (as a language for understanding how a large number of diverse actors are connected to one another); “but there has been no attempt to integrate all four concepts.”

With this evolution, since the publication of Lipsky’s (1980) ‘Street Level Bureaucracy’, comes emphasis on what Berman (1978) refers to as micro-implementation. Accompanying an increasing move towards micro-implementation studies, comes a call for the use of multidisciplinary approaches, in particular the use of additional interpretive research methodologies. Owing to the significance of sensemaking to the implementation process, Yanow (1996) maintains that an “interpretive approach is necessary” (in Mischen and Sinclair, 2007, p.161):

An interpretive approach to the human, or social, world shifts the focus from discovering a set of universal laws about objective, sense-based facts to the human capacity for making and communicating meaning. Unlike apples and other elements of the physical world, humans make meaning; interpret the meaning created by others; communicate their meanings to, and share them with, others. We act; we have intentions about our actions; we interpret others' actions. We make sense of the world: we are meaning-creatures. Our social institutions, our policies, our agencies are human creations, not objects independent of us.

The focus on the sensemaking of micro-level actors offers valuable insights into the inconsistency between policy signal and actual practice. One further issue for in-depth research study is the differences in how professionals at various levels within the public sector make sense of provincial and national policy objectives, or influence the sensemaking of the others. Another aspect to consider is that studies of policy implementation suggest the level of discretion allocated to professionals responsible for delivering services to target community in the public sector accounts for much of the unevenness in implementation outcomes (Spillane et al., 2002). A lesson drawn from some of the illustrations used in this thesis to anchor conceptualisation is that research designed to examine tensions that often arise between policy designers and professionals in public sector institutions is warranted. This necessitates an examination of how the sensemaking processes of top government officials compare with those of officials at lower levels. Understanding the differences and similarities between various camps provide useful information about the incongruities in policy interpretations during sensemaking.

Macro- and micro-level players might work to structure policy content and strategy processes in ways that facilitate the potential influence of either or both groups. On the other hand, in situations in which macro-level actors lack policy issue-related competency at local level and are perceived as such by micro-level actors, the latter's active involvement on issues provoke them to gain expertise and legitimacy through their mutual involvement, while the former do not gain anything, thereby becoming more emboldened and overcritical in their assessment of the policy designers' legitimacy and capability with respect to that policy issue. An inverse dynamic may similarly apply, whereby macro-level actors are more knowledgeable about policy issues than implementers. In this instance, micro-implementation sensitivities to macro-level competency will peter out their own motivation to engage actively on issues.

Investigating either potentially problematic pattern is important because diminished or inconsistent sensegiving by actors at both levels may lead to less effective implementation.

Furthermore, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that policy designers and grass roots players seek to minimise each other's influence so that either is in a position to direct sensemaking and decision-making more closely around an issue that will lead to a partisan outcome. For example, policymakers might endeavour to curtail implementers' perception or understanding of an issue as important and work to demean their capabilities and legitimacy. Equally, if implementers wish to prevail over top officials on a local issue, they would seek to denigrate the policy designers' expertise as well as disdain perception of past performance of relevant areas of policy. These dynamics point to the importance of research that examines the strategies by which actors across all levels shape meaning construction, setting the conditions for influencing the sensemaking of others as well as the circumstance associated with such strategies.

To paint a richer picture on whether the sensemaking of implementation agents leads to understanding that truly reflects policy intention, data collection, emergent categorisation and analysis should shed more light on how their behaviour influences implementation. Relevant information must include prior working experience, years of experience in implementing similar policies, education background, age, etc. Systematically collecting this type of information provides us with more comprehensive profiles. Comparing the profiles of various actors highlight important factors that inform reaction to policy issues, ongoing sensemaking; predilection for sensegiving; or whether there exist barriers such as technical know-how or knowledge that could hinder connecting understanding with enactment.

Finally, the phases of the sensemaking and sensegiving of the actors involved in the implementation process could be documented empirically using qualitative research methods that are well suited for research exploring a process such as sensemaking. When macro- and micro-actors are made aware of their own sensemaking processes, they can make adjustments – more sophisticated frameworks could be adopted instead of superficial oversimplifications. Research might seek to discover whether there exists sufficient awareness and understanding of the sensemaking process for the emergence of behaviours, adaptive thoughts, as well as to suggest topics for professional development to those involved in policy implementation.

While the participation of grassroots actors in policy formulation and implementation can engender commitment and motivation, it does not ensure action; rather, it affects participants' sensemaking and the degree to which they understand policy text, what they are being asked to do and the rationale for doing it. This thesis emphasises the importance of paying attention to lower- and high-level active sensemaking and sensegiving mechanisms to alter previous perceptions of and prescriptions of implementation activities. The important implication of this view for policy designers and manager is to aim to introduce more implementation activities that focus on trial and error as a viable alternative to stressing planning and cognitive understanding prior to action.

Future research may benefit from probing further sensemaking and sensegiving mechanisms that are used in implementation by building on and extending an argument that both processes are ongoing and highly subjective to social influence. To realise this, possible questions for future research need to examine: (1) patterns and the degree of engagement by both managers and frontline workers on policy messaging, or whether they arrive at different meaning about the same policy initiative; (2) the information and type of policy issues considered by macro-level actors when they select issues in their engagement with frontline implementers; or (3) the influence of contextual variables from the environment, both inside and outside implementing agencies and the impact on all actors' sensemaking on the issues.

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