



## Chasing the Promise of Performance

A Case Study Exploring the Implementation of a Standards-based Accountability Policy Intervention in the Ontario Public Health System

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## The Promise of Performance

*we cannot - and should not - continue to rely on the assumed relationship between accountability and performance... This position is not based on the contention that the assumption is false, but rather that it is unarticulated and untested.*

- Melvin Dubnick



(Dubnick 2005, p.40)

## Key Terms of Reference

**Accountability** involves a relationship between parties, where one holds authority over another that has an obligation to explain and justify actions, which can be the basis for reward or sanction.

**Policy implementation** is a process that occurs at the practice level by public administrators and managers and their subordinates. The implementation process is guided by the intent or goals of a policy that are reflected in specific interventions devised to achieve those goals.

An **accountability policy intervention** is a tool or set of tools designed to facilitate the clear communication of obligations for performance to a party or parties who have the responsibility of reporting and answering for their practice to an authority holding account over them.



(Bovens 2006; Behn 2001; Van Meter 1975; Edwards 1980; Mazmanian 1983; Alexander 1985; CDC 2007; Bemelmans-Videc 1998)

## Research Merit and Purpose

- Little is known about the implementation of accountability policies such as public health standards and their potential effects on performance.
- **What we do know:** Poorly conceived and planned implementation can negatively affect the achievement of policy goals.
- **Purpose:** To explore the effects of different approaches to the implementation of a standards-based accountability policy intervention.



(Pressman & Wildavsky 1974)

# Theoretical Approach

## Paradigms of implementation:

- Hierarchical (Top-down)
- Managerial (Bottom-up)

## Contingency implementation framework: (four modes)

1. Administrative implementation (hierarchical)
2. Political implementation (hierarchical)
3. Experimental implementation (managerial)
4. Symbolic implementation (managerial)



(Degroff & Cargo, 2009; Hammond, Meier, Thomas, & Van, 1993; Hasenfeld & Brock, 1991; Stiglitz, 1975; Deakin, 1994; Elmore, 1979; Hoggett, 1994; Matland, 1995; Pollitt, 1993; Romzek & Dubnick, 1987; Sanderson, 1998; Dahrendorf, 1958)

## Matland's Contingency Implementation Framework

Mode	Conflict	Ambiguity	Primary Driver of Change	Notes
Administrative	Low	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normative Compliance <i>(the reference to legitimately perceived authorities and mutually held goals)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources also seen as a determinant of implementation</li> </ul>
Political	High	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power <i>(Coercive authority)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This mode focuses on compliance-seeking to control implementation and prevent destabilization</li> </ul>
Experimental	Low	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement of policy champions in the micro-implementation environment</li> <li>• Resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lack of consensus re: policy goals and feasibility foster a collaborative environment</li> <li>• Implementation is oriented towards <i>learning</i></li> </ul>
Symbolic	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strength of local level coalitions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation is necessarily vague</li> <li>• Focus is on reaffirming common goals and values</li> </ul>



(Matland, 1995)

## Research Questions

1. How does the mode (i.e. hierarchical, managerial, or mixed) of implementing an accountability policy intervention affect public health performance in the areas of chronic and infectious disease prevention and control?
2. How does the actual implementation of the accountability policy intervention support or refute Matland's contingency implementation perspective?
3. Where is internal management and bureaucratic accountability emphasized and what are the implications on the implementation of the accountability policy intervention?



## Analytical Framework

- Establish indications of policy ambiguity and conflict prior to implementation
- Determine proposed contingency implementation mode based on conflict and ambiguity
- Compare actual implementation approaches to primary mechanisms of change in the various modes
- Compare actual implementation approaches to managerial and hierarchical preferences and conditions for implementation success
- Compare accountability intent (compliance, performance improvement, or a mixture of both) of interventions with perceptions of implementation success and managerial response to the intervention.



## Design and Methodology

- Three case studies, each consisting of a PHU; informants ranging from MOH to managers and support professionals
- Supplementary informants: MHLTC
- Random selection of PHUs based on peer group and governance model
- **Methods:** In-depth interviews, PH manager survey, Document review, and Reflection discussions (n=~8-10, mainly executive)
- **Coding and Analysis:** Theoretically established initial coding scheme, updated iteratively as directed content analysis is carried out. Atlas.ti is being used for QDA.



## Progress to Date

- 24 in-depth interviews completed
- Primary thematic coding complete for all interviews
- 212 codes and 101 memos
- 12 PHUs recruited for program manager survey
- 99 surveys distributed, 54 completed (ongoing)



## Next Steps

- PH manager survey closes at the end of November. An analysis of the questionnaires will be conducted and preliminary reports sent to participating PHUs
- Preliminary reports of interview findings will be sent to the 3 case sites
- A limited, second round of interviews will be conducted with case site informants in the NY
- Final analysis of all data will feed into three publishable manuscripts that will also be the basis of my thesis defense



## Thank You

**Please send comments and questions to:**  
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