LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Predominantly concerned with the quality of public policy and knowledge of government action, state centered public policy analysis is by necessity both descriptive and prescriptive in nature (Dye, 1976 in Ham and Hill, 1993). This said, and in spite of the recent increase in the utilisation of academic research as an instrument of policy advocacy, policy prescription is not an explicit goal of public policy analysis. Accordingly, the nature of public policy analysis is thus determined by the issue under review and the purpose of the investigation. As such, public policy analysis may be classified into two groups, that is, analysis ‘for’ policy (whose aim is to improve the quality of policy through prescription) and analysis ‘of’ policy (whose aim is to generate insight into the policy process through description of various stages in this process). Public policy analysis may be further divided by the separation of policy making and policy implementation in the analysis of the policy process. Given these assertions, it must be noted that all policy analysis recognises public policy as: (i) as course of action or inaction, (ii) not customarily manifest in a single decision, (iii) invariably changes over time, and (iv) is owned by the state (Ham and Hill, 1993).

Policy analysis in the field of policy making is a task complicated by the density of available theoretical perspectives, ranging from the Systems Theory of Easton (Ham and Hill 1993), the Rational Actor Model (Ibid., 1993) and Organisational Process Theory (Ibid., 19993). Evidently, theoretical perspectives in the analysis of policy making are generally contained within the social sub-disciplines of political science and organisational analysis. Given the relatively recent rise of policy analysis in the field of implementation, the same cannot be said of policy implementation. Quite simply, and despite the numerous hypotheses of scholars in the field of implementation research, there is as yet no distinct and unifying theory of implementation (Wenzel, 2002). As such, analysis of policy implementation is generally recognised as an applied sub-field of the social sciences whose parameters are most often defined by the nature and purpose of the investigation, rather than as a supra science subjected to generalised over arching theoretical perspectives (Ham and Hill, 1993 and Mayentz 1965 in Wenzel, 2002).
Consequently, and given the diversity within extant implementation literature (spanning fields as broad and distinct as political science, public policy and administration, and social psychology), the inherent nature of implementation studies is to co-opt and extract ideas of a wide range of disciplines within the social sciences (Ham and Hill, 1993 and Wenzel, 2002).

According to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975 in Ham and Hill, 1997), any actions directed to the achievement of stated and recognised policy objectives may be considered policy implementation. Acknowledging policy implementation as a distinct field of study, conventional analysis of policy implementation utilises variants of an inflexible top-down model, in which policy is taken to be the property and therefore wholly influenced by policy makers, as the framework by which to evaluate public policy implementation. Developed by Pressman and Wildalsky (1973 in Wenzel, 2002), the general top-down model view of public policy implementation emphasises the ‘implementation deficit’ as the fundamental mechanism with which to explain success or failure in public policy implementation (Ham and Hill, 1993). The top-down approach to analysis of public policy implementation makes numerous assumptions about the policy process. These assumptions, evident to varying degrees in the works of Pressman and Wildalsky (1973 in Wenzel, 2002), Hogwood and Gunn (1984 in Wenzel, 2002), Sabatier and Mazmanian (1979 in Wenzel, 2002), are the basis of and expand on the idea that policy makers are in complete control of the entire policy process. As such, policy makers are the only agents involved in the policy process with the ability to take effective action to rectify any and all ‘implementation deficits’.

As is almost always the case, the assumptions on which the top-down (any) model is built are far too restrictive to account for the nuance and complexity of the real world. In the case under review, the division of responsibility for policy making and policy implementation between the national and provincial levels of government highlight this point. Essentially plagued by rigid assumptions regarding the policy process, determined and dogmatic utilisation of the top-down model would limit the scope of this inquiry and is thus wholly unsuitable for the purposes of this investigation. This said, the concept of
an ‘implementation deficit’, that is, the cumulative sum of all failures to act and delays in action within the network of organisations responsible for policy implementation, provides a robust basis for the conceptual framework developed for the purpose of this inquiry. This is especially so given the explicit goal directed activities that are part of the National HIV/AIDS/STI Plan for South Africa: 2000-2005 and are the focus of this investigation. The nature and purpose of this investigation again dictate the formulation of a multifaceted conceptual framework capable of analysis at a variety of levels. The fact that provincial governments, which are relatively detached from the policy making process are vital to policy implementation, is a testament to this assertion. As such, a synthesis of top-down and bottom-up approaches is crucial to a complete analysis of successes and failures in the implementation of a life skills programme in all Gauteng primary and secondary schools.

Building a conceptual framework utilising existing models within the field of implementation research in a piecemeal manner permits a comprehensive study that integrates numerous perspectives (Wenzel, 2002). In this way, I hope to eliminate restricted, one-sided and uncritical analysis. Unfortunately, this approach also prohibits the possibility of evaluating any research findings against a common standard within existing implementation research. Nevertheless, given the dearth of literature on HIV/AIDS public policy implementation in South Africa and the desire to present as rounded, critical and insightful an analysis as possible, I believe this to be a necessary and worthy trade off.

In conjunction with the work of Hilderbrand and Grindle (1994 in Brijal and Gilson, 1997), and Brijal and Gilson (1997), the synthesis of models presented by Wenzel (2002) can be developed further. The confluence of ideas and perspectives emerging from the synthesis of these varied models allows us to distinguish between the internal and external environments for successful public policy implementation. In the framework developed for this investigation, the internal environment is made up of: (i) the task network or ‘policy delivery network’ (Grindle, 1980), that is, those organisations delegated with the responsibility for policy implementation, (ii) individual organisations...
within the task network, and (iii) the public sector institutional context. Building on these constituents, the external environment within this conceptual framework encompasses the social, political and economic context within which policy implementation must proceed. To be sure, the conceptual framework developed in order to investigate the implementation of a life skills education programme in all Gauteng schools utilises three different lenses with which to identify so called ‘implementation deficits’. These lenses are: (i) the ‘micro’ lens that focuses on each organisation and the membership of each organisation in the task network, (ii) the ‘macro’ lens that is applied to the task network in its entirety, as well as the public sector institutional context, and (iii) the ‘meso’ lens that allows analysis of the external economic, social and political context and its relative impact upon policy implementation. Utilising the conceptual framework developed above, and through the identification of deficits from each of these viewpoints, an accurate, detailed and broad analysis of policy implementation can be achieved.

As outlined in the model for successful policy implementation developed by Brijal and Gilson (1997), implementation deficits at each level will be identified according to the following criteria. Regarding the task network, those factors influencing policy implementation are: (i) the existence of frameworks defining goals for co-ordinated action that are clear and specific with respect to organisational responsibilities, (ii) the existence and operation of mechanisms for horizontal and vertical interaction, and (iii) a common training practice for all potential life skills facilitators. With respect to organisations within the task network, characteristics affecting implementation are: (i) an adequate level of (human resource) skills and expertise, as well as the material resources necessary to achieve stated objectives, and (ii) the provision of training for life skills facilitators. In terms of the public sector institutional context the following factors are crucial to policy implementation: (i) accountability within and amongst the network of organisations, and (ii) the nature of this accountability, that is, centralised (vertical) or decentralised (horizontal) accountability. With respect to the external environment for successful policy implementation, the most notable factors are a stable economic, political and social environment. In terms of the political environment, this stability is
characterised by strong leadership in the pursuit of a well defined and shared goal, and also includes the effect of meso level institutional change.

Before proceeding any further I would like to clarify the above assertions. The conceptual framework developed for this investigation is designed to: (i) describe whether each organisation within the task network, and the task network as a whole achieved its time specific objectives with respect to the selected strategy under review, and (ii) explain progress in and obstacles to implementation of the selected strategy according to the synthesis of ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ models of policy implementation presented above. In essence, I have adopted an approach that bonds numerous, specific evaluation processes into a single, broad framework for evaluation. There is no need to design an instrument to measure the performance of each organisation comprising the task network, since these instruments already exist. To summarise, the adopted approach regards the process of policy implementation as a chain that begins with the identification and precise definition of a goal. This goal is sequentially followed by the delineation of an objective and is terminated by the outlining of a strategy that assigns responsibility for the realisation of the said goal to specific actors (Bates and Eldrege, 1980). In the second step, the performance of these actors is assessed according to the specific criteria presented above. In this way, the conceptual framework developed and adopted for this inquiry permits both description and explanation.

To conclude, Staudt’s (1985) work serves as a useful guide to identifying obstacles to implementation within the implementation strategy of the NSP. The work of Bates and Elderedge (1980) is useful in deconstructing the entire implementation process, and identifying implementation deficits that can be attributed to specific organisations during particular phases of the implementation process. Wenzel (2002) acts as a guide on the practical application of the adapted conceptual framework utilised within this inquiry and is also useful as an introduction into applied evaluation research. Finally, Taback’s (2001) paradigm will be used to initiate identification and analysis of institutional, human resource, and public sector institutional constraints on the policy implementation process,
as well as examine the influence of external political factors on the process of policy implementation.