

**Tracking the Implementation of Voluntary Sector-Government Policy Agreements:
Is the Voluntary and Community Sector in the Frame? ¹**

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Abstract:

Central governments have entered into bilateral policy agreements [as distinct from regulatory or legislative measures] with a collective of voluntary sector representatives. This has resulted in the signing of a Compact in the UK (1998), the Voluntary Sector Accord in Canada (2001), and similar agreements in Eastern Europe.

There has been particular interest in tracking the implementation of bilateral voluntary sector-government policy agreements, particularly within and between Canada and the UK. To date, much of this analysis has been process oriented, profiling trends and highlighting issues of key stakeholders. This paper analyses these policy agreements in the context of a broader Policy Implementation Framework (PIF), initially developed by Paul Sabatier and Daniel Mazmanian in the early 1980s. The application of the PIF to voluntary sector-government policy agreements revealed that there are at least two variables which have not been accounted for in the existing framework. These two variables, the horizontal nature of policy implementation and its bilateral nature have implications for a number of features of the PIF. This paper then examines the viability of incorporating these outstanding variables into the existing PIF.

This research furthers the theoretical exploration of policy implementation models and the systematic examination of Voluntary Sector-Government policy agreements.

Introduction

Both Canada (2001) and England (1998) have entered into national bilateral voluntary sector-government policy agreements (Government of Canada, 2001; Straw et al., 1998). The Canadian Accord, like the Compact, is a framework agreement which outlines a shared vision, values, general principles, and a mutual commitment to building a positive future relationship toward common purposes. The Accord is designed to strengthen the relationship between the two sectors by 1) encouraging better partnering practices; 2) fostering consistent treatment of voluntary organizations across government; and 3) promoting a better understanding within each sector of the constraints, operations and practices of the other. The policy agreements in both countries are seen as 'intention setters' the intention of relations between the two sectors (Brock, 2004b; Morison, 2000).

A number of policy researchers have analyzed Accord/Compact developments in both Canada and England (Brock, 2004a; Carrington, 2002; Craig et al., 2005; Good, 2003; Morison, 2000; Phillips, 2004b). Much of this analysis has been process focused, drawing on the seminal work of John Kingdon, and has been insightful in drawing out the dynamics of issues, policies and politics of voluntary sector relations with their respective national governments (Kingdon, 1995).

This paper takes a different tack. I utilize a Policy Implementation Framework (PIF), which takes not process, but material, structural, and contextual variables into account (Sabatier, 1986).

Why this framework?

Paul Sabatier and Daniel Mazmanian developed their 'top - down' theoretical framework for analyzing policy implementation in the early 1980s, which applied a number of statutory and non-statutory variables to five identified stages in the policy implementation process [see Figure 1] (Sabatier et al., 1980). This approach to policy implementation analysis is grounded in policy theory, such as veto points and causal theory (Mazmanian et al., 1989b; Pressman et al., 1973).

The PIF model has been shown to have a comparative advantage to a more ‘bottom –up’ approach under the following four circumstances: 1) when there is a dominant piece of legislation or policy which is structuring the situation to be analyzed; 2) when research funds are limited; 3) when the focus is on the extent to which the overall system is structured or constrained and mean responses are desired; and 4) when the circumstances are structured at least moderately well (Mazmanian et al., 1989b). All of these conditions are exemplified by the Accord/Compact agreements.

The PIF provides the opportunity to address the following four policy implementation issues: 1) the extent to which the actions of implementing officials and target groups are consistent with the objectives and procedures outlined in the policy decision; 2) the extent to which policy objectives were attained; 3) the principal factors affecting policy outcomes and impacts; and 4) how the policy was, or was not, reformulated. In addition, the PIF provides a conceptual framework to address policy implementation issues within a broader socio-economic context.

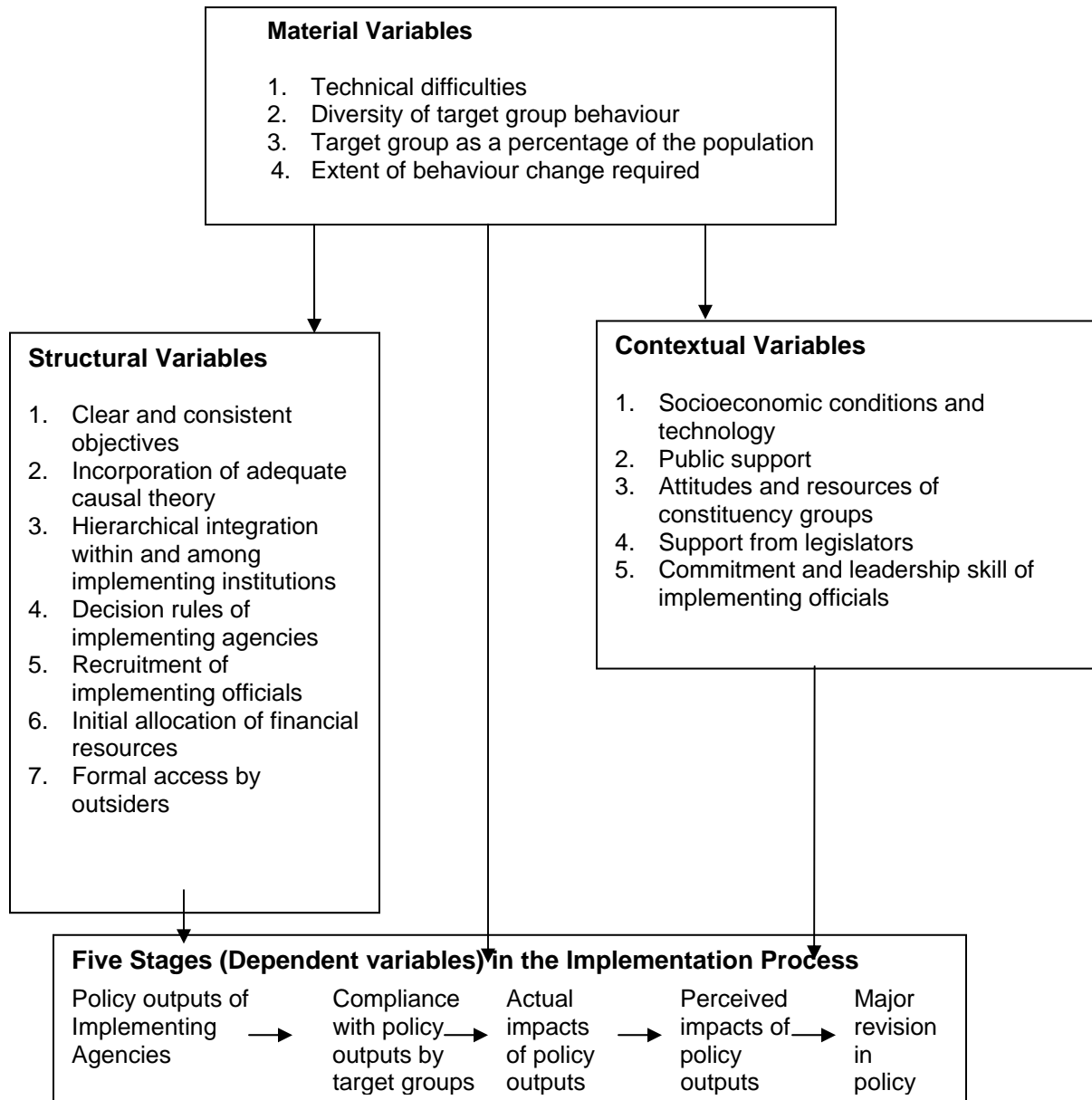
The analysis timeframe for the appropriate application of the PIF has been set at between twenty and thirty-five years to allow for slow starts and the re-emergence of issues after a hiatus. Since the two voluntary sector-government agreements in Canada and England have only been in place for five and eight years respectively, this paper addresses the suitability of the framework for a long-term policy implementation analysis for the Accord/Compact, rather than any definitive answer as to whether the policy implementation has been successful. However, some implementation success factors are determined by the initial context in which the policy is launched, and these will be identified.

The Policy Implementation Framework (PIF)

According to Mazmanian and Sabatier, the crucial role of implementation analysis is to identify the variables that affect the achievement of the policy objectives throughout the entire process. These variables can be divided into three broad categories: 1) the *material* variables associated with the problem(s) being addressed; 2) the *structural* dimensions which influence the implementation process; and 3) the net effect of a variety of *contextual* variables to support the policy [my emphasis]. These three independent variables are applied by Mazmanian and Sabatier to five stages of policy implementation.

Figure 1

Policy Implementation Framework (PIF)



Reference: Modified from Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983). *Implementation and Public Policy*. Used with permission of the author.

Material Variables

Material variables apply to the core intent of the policy. Small and well defined policy changes are easier to support, politically, and have a greater chance of achieving success (Mazmanian et al., 1983). On the other hand, significant and complex changes require less focused regulations and much greater discretion on the part for implementing officials.

The need for hierarchical integration and variances in bureaucratic commitment to policy objectives has an impact on policy implementation (Mazmanian et al., 1983). The challenges of diverse behaviour in hierarchical organizations are considerable (Mazmanian et al., 1983), and even more so when combined with horizontal governance across multiple government departments, and the inherent diversity of the voluntary sector (Phillips, 2004b).

Structural Variables

There are seven structural variables which influence policy implementation: 1) clear and consistent objectives; 2) incorporation of an adequate causal theory; 3) hierarchical integration within and among implementing institutions; 4) decision rules of implementing agencies; 5) recruitment of implementing agencies; 6) formal access by outsiders; and 7) the initial allocation of financial resources (Mazmanian et al., 1983).

Hierarchical integration within and among implementing institutions (e.g. federal or central government department or agencies) is determined by two factors: 1) the number of veto/clearance points involved in the implementation of the policy objectives; and 2) the extent to which the supporters of the policy objectives have both incentives and sanctions to advance compliance. Veto/clearance points are defined as occasions when an intermediary has the capacity (not necessarily the authority) to impede progress (Mazmanian et al., 1981; Mazmanian et al., 1983).

This is a critical variable as veto/clearance points reflect both institutional support and the commitment and leadership of implementing officials. Horizontal governance, and the impact of conflicting priorities with existing or emerging mandates across multiple government departments, has been addressed by several researchers on both on both sides of the Atlantic (Brock, 2004a; Craig et al., 2005; Phillips, 2004b).

Successful policy implementation also requires formal opportunities for external stakeholders to influence policy implementation and independent evaluation studies to be conducted. If the policy is formalized in statute, then legal challenges are available. Otherwise, there is substantial reliance on the commitment and skill of implementing officials and the organized support of external stakeholders and legislators to keep the implementation process moving forward (Mazmanian et al., 1989a).

Contextual Variables

Legislators provide support to policy implementation by controlling: 1) the amount and direction of oversight; 2) financial resources; and 3) the introduction of new, and possibly conflicting, policies (Mazmanian et al., 1983).

One key variable which directly affects policy output is the recruitment of leaders for the implementing agencies. These leaders need to possess substantial managerial and political skill and be committed to the policy goals. These policy 'fixers' go beyond what would normally be expected of their position and available resources, to ensure as much policy implementation as possible takes place.

Beyond the material and structural aspect of policy implementation, a policy needs a periodic political boost to maintain its visibility and relevance in a changing socioeconomic climate. Policy objectives should not be undermined by the emergence of conflicting public policies (Mazmanian et al., 1983). Further, changes in the resources and attitudes of external stakeholders play a role (Mazmanian et al., 1983). Strong intermediary organizations need the membership, resources, and expertise to position themselves as legitimate and necessary participants in the policy implementation process.

Five Stages of Policy Implementation

There are five stages of policy implementation presented by Sabatier and Mazmanian: 1) policy outputs (decisions) of departments; 2) compliance of internal and external target groups with those decisions; 3) actual impact of agency decisions; 4) perceived impact of those decisions and 5) political system's revision of the original policy (Mazmanian et al., 1983). [See Figure 1] This process can be broken down into two stages: the first three steps address policy output; and the latter two address the political system's relationship to the policy.

Application of the PIF to the Accord with comparisons to the Compact

Accord/Compact like agreements have been signed by national governments in a number of countries, and by regional and local jurisdictions within countries (Bullain et al., 2005; Phillips, 2005a; Toftisova, 2005). All these agreements have been based, to a significant degree, on the original Compact (Phillips, 2001). They create responsibilities on the part of governments to develop better practices toward the voluntary sector. These agreements embody a shared vision and principles and a commitment to mutual understandings based on responsibilities of partnership (Phillips, 2002). Both the Accord and the Compact acknowledge the independence, and the diversity, of the voluntary and community sector. In addition, the themes of accountability, governance, and representation within these agreements provide the foundation for the production of more detailed codes of good practice (Elson, 2004).

Material Variables in the Accord

Target group

In the case of the Accord, the target group can be defined as relevant bureaucrats in the federal/national bureaucracy and their affiliated agencies and potentially all registered charities or non-profits. In Canada, charities under federal jurisdiction number about 80,000 (Hall et al., 2004). To put this number in perspective, eighty per cent of the voluntary sector organizations in Canada are comprised of small organizations with revenues less than \$250,000 a year.

Diversity of the target group behaviour

There was considerable diversity in the type of relationship between the federal government and voluntary organizations before the launch of the Accord. The extent to which these initial trajectories have continued is one question which can be addressed within this framework. While systematic implementation data is sketchy, there is reason to assume that departments who have demonstrated initial policy implementation success are also the ones which held a pre-existing and constructive working relationship with voluntary organizations. One clue in this regard is contained in the 2003 voluntary sector report on the implementation of the Canadian Accord. The majority of respondents reported a good relationship with the federal government, while at the same time over half reported little or no change in their relationship (Brock, 2004a). In addition, an internal government survey revealed that more socially-orientated departments [e.g. Heritage

Canada, Social Development Canada, Health Canada] were ahead of others in implementing the Accord.³

Structural Variables in the Accord/Compact

Clear and consistent objectives?

The Accord in Canada is very general and lacks any specific departmental commitments. Trade-offs between [Accord] policy options were not confronted during negotiations, nor was an operational framework for choosing among alternative program initiatives developed prior to the signing of the Accord (Good, 2003).

There is certainly a greater level of detailed expectations outlined in the Codes of Good Practice. The Canadian Code of Good Practice on Funding specifies that the government will “use multi-year funding agreements and develop and implement mechanisms to facilitate their use ...” and “manage funds effectively to eliminate problems caused by the distribution of a concentrated amount of funding to organizations at the end of the fiscal year” (VSI, 2002, 13). While the objectives appear to be reasonably clear and consistent with the principles of the Accord, there is still considerable room for interpretation.

Valid causal theory?

How well understood are the policy statements outlined in the Accord? In Canada, the incentive for the Accord agreement was ambiguous. The Accord was the bi-product of broad-based but disconnected voluntary sector representation, and a short-term “feel good” Liberal government political agenda (Johnston, 2000; Johnston, 2005; Phillips, 2003). This latter view is reflected in the governments’ desire to avoid contentious areas of discussion (e.g. advocacy, financing), and still achieve a concrete ‘deliverable’ (e.g. the Accord) by the conclusion of the International Year of Volunteers in 2001 (Brock, 2004b; Phillips, 2003; Phillips, 2004a).

A valid causal theory also calls for officials responsible for implementing the program to have jurisdiction over a sufficient number of the critical linkages needed to achieve the policy objectives (Mazmanian et al., 1983). In Canada, three of the most significant voluntary sector initiatives are divided between different departments; and six different layers of responsibility lie between the lead ministers and horizontal requirements directed to deputy ministers (Brock, 2004a). Without a central co-ordinating body with the authority to direct other departments, this sets up a myriad of potential veto points.

Hierarchical integration in Departments?

The degree of hierarchical integration depends on a) the number of veto points/ clearance points involved in the attainment of policy objectives; and b) the extent to which supporters of those objectives are provided with inducements and sanctions sufficient to ensure tacit approval by those with a potential veto.

One positive example has been the transition of the Canadian Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA), responsible for charity registration and regulation, who have increased their level of transparency and consultation with the sector, clarified their advocacy regulations, and initiated a Charities Advisory Committee (CCRA, 2005; Johnston, 2005).

However, consistent vertical and horizontal implementation clearly remains an on-going challenge for both the sector and the government (Compact, 2005a ; Eakin, 2005; Voluntary

³ The author had direct access to an internal government Accord implementation survey.

Sector Forum, 2005). Only in March, 2006 did the federal government, following a very public clash, post the position of a “fairness advisor” to intervene in cases where there are contract disputes (ServiceCanada, 2006). In contrast, the English Compact strategically included an allowance for a mediation process to resolve differences, a mechanism which has been exercised on a number of occasions (Straw et al., 1998).

Decision rules of implementing agencies?

In Canada, a series of Auditor General’s reports which highlighted weaknesses in federal [*private sector*] funding practices have cast a shadow over all agreements, including those with voluntary sector organizations. The result has been a significant increase in accountability and reporting requirements, micromanagement practices, and a general reluctance of government departments to take any calculated risks (Eakin, 2005; Phillips et al., 2005; Scott, 2003). This type of practice is in direct contrast to the terms of the Accord and the Codes of Good Practice for Funding, which explicitly acknowledges the independence of the voluntary sector and calls for multi-year and flexible funding agreements (Government of Canada, 2001 ; VSI, 2002).

Officials’ commitment to policy objectives?

No matter how well a policy structures the formal decision making process, the support of officials in the implementing agencies is key to the achievement of those objectives (Mazmanian et al., 1983). Any new program requires implementers who are in a position to develop necessary regulations and enforce them in the face of resistance from bureaucrats or other target groups.

The Accord agreement is a fundamentally a horizontal governance issue and as such, ‘champions’ within government have been appointed/ designated to assume the lead for implementation of the Accord within departments. The status and authority [and thus impact] of these champions varies considerably across departments. While often an assistant deputy minister, this individual liaises with the lead department (Social Development Canada) and “spreads the word” at the departmental level (Brock, 2004a). While it is still viewed as ‘early days’ in the implementation process, the focus to date appears to have been more on promotional sizzle than regulatory substance.

Phillips points out that the political saliency of the issues is kept alive when ministers and deputy ministers are involved in the decision making process. Without such decision points, they are likely to disengage, creating few incentives for middle managers to stay connected to issues which their department may touch on, but are not central to their mandate (Phillips, 2004b). On the other hand, there is much the voluntary sector needs to do to raise importance of this policy priority within its own ranks, and collectively take steps to address implementation issues (Johnston, 2005).

Formal access by outsiders and independent evaluation?

Policy implementation will be affected by the extent to which opportunities for participation by target group representatives are created through formal decision making forums and independent evaluation studies (Mazmanian et al., 1983).

In Canada, most individual organizations have to struggle to either address or absorb any policy discrepancies on their own (Eakin, 2005; Goar, 2005; Scott, 2003; ServiceCanada, 2006). The policy [as distinct from formal legal] status of the Accord limits the availability of any legal venues, giving way in both countries to the relative importance both parties place in investing politically and practically in the development of a long-term and mutually beneficial relationship. The provision for formal independent evaluation studies by relatively independent observers are beneficial to the achievement of policy objectives (Mazmanian et al., 1983). In Canada there has been no call to date for a systematic or independent implementation data collection process

(Government of Canada, 2003; Government of Canada, 2004; Voluntary Sector Forum, 2003; Voluntary Sector Forum, 2004).

Adequate financial resources to achieve launch?

Money is critical. Without it staff can't be hired, regulations are undeveloped, programs are not administered and compliance is not monitored. In general, a threshold of funding is required in order to launch the program and above this threshold funds allocated will be proportionally related to the ultimate achieve policy objectives (Mazmanian et al., 1983). Inadequate funding can doom a policy program before it gets started. Since funding needs to be reviewed periodically by the legislature, the extent to which funds are approved is an important indicator of the degree of legislative and executive support for the program. In Canada, while an initial \$95 million was allocated to voluntary sector initiatives over a five-year period, far less than \$1 million was allocated by the government to support implementation of the Accord within the sector, and no new funds were announced in the 2005 budget (Christie, 2005).

In England, new voluntary sector capacity investments are an on-going part of a 10-year strategic plan, including the most recent £70 million addition to an initial £80 million allocated to build sectoral capacity at a national and local level (HomeOffice, 2005). These investments are also leveraged by the mainstream role of voluntary organizations as exemplified by their growing role in service delivery, the 2002 cross-cutting review, and the active and rigorous scrutiny the Compact has received from academic researchers and dedicated media.

Comparative Policy Implementation Status

To answer the question of where the Compact and the Accord are in the context of this framework, published research and implementation reports were analyzed and two senior representatives of the voluntary sector in Canada and the UK with an intimate knowledge of the Accord/ Compact were interviewed. Notwithstanding the variance in time-frames between the two agreements, the following factors were assessed: clarity and consistency of policy objectives; the adequacy and validity of causal theory and jurisdiction; a supportive implementation process (assignment to sympathetic agencies, adequate hierarchical integration, supportive decision rules, and sufficient financial resources); commitment and skill of implementing officials; continuing support from supporters and legislators; and changes in supportive conditions.

For the majority of variables (seven of ten) profiled in Table I, [see below] Canada's policy implementation status was rated low-moderate, (notable obstacles to effective implementation with some factors which were conducive, but problems still existing). Of the remaining three variables, supportive decision rules and formal access by supporters were rated low and clear, and consistent objectives was given a moderate rating.

In England (national level only), eight of ten variables were given a moderate or a moderate to high (strong asset in effective implementation of policy objectives) and the remaining two, assignment to sympathetic agencies and supportive conditions not undermined, received a high rating.

Table I

	<u>Canada</u> (yrs 1-2)	<u>England</u> (yrs 1-5)
1. Clear and consistent objectives	moderate	moderate
2. Adequate causal theory high	low - moderate	moderate-high

3. Implementation process enhances compliance		
a) assignment to sympathetic agencies	low-moderate	high
b) adequate hierarchical integration	low	moderate
c) supportive decision rules	low-moderate	moderate
d) sufficient financial resources	low-moderate	moderate – high
e) formal access by supporters	low	moderate - high
4. Committed and skilful implementing officials	low – moderate	
moderate		
5. Support of interest groups and legislators	low – moderate	
moderate - high		
6. Supportive conditions not undermined	low – moderate	high
<hr/>		
Overall Rating of Implementing Effectiveness (to date)	minimal	adequate/ substantial

HIGH = A strong asset in effective implementation of policy objectives

MODERATE = Conducive to effective implementation, although some problems

LOW = Notable obstacle to effective implementation

NEUTRAL = Factor played little or no role implementation effort

At this point in time Canada's current trajectory reflects a modest initial effort with a less than medium degree of policy conformity. Only time will tell if the current level of support will gradually erode, improve, or undergo a hiatus and be resurrected at a later point in time if conditions change. The actual policies outlined in the Accord and the Codes are conducive to their implementation, but a lack of authority, direction, and priority in relation to existing policies has clearly slowed policy implementation.

In England, the political and policy dynamics conspired to provide a strong initial launch of the Compact. It has subsequently received a number of 'boosts' to keep the Compact timely, relevant and on the forefront of the governments' political and policy agenda. The voluntary sector has risen to the occasion through the work of the NCVO as a voice for the sector, policy researchers have scrutinized developments on an on-going basis, and substantive support has been received by the media.

Comparative Political Contexts

A policy may establish the basic structure under which the politics of implementation take place, but it is also driven a) by the need for constant or periodic infusion of political support to override competing agendas and b) the constituencies on whose support the policy depends (Mazmanian et al., 1983).

Attitudes and resources of Constituency groups

Changes in the resources and attitudes of constituency groups also play a role in the achievement of policy objectives. In Canada, the voluntary sector fell over the Accord finish line operationally exhausted and politically impoverished, resulting in a significant turnover of leadership within the voluntary sector, a situation from which it is just now starting to emerge (Phillips, 2004b) ¹.

In addition, the federal system of government in Canada means that the operations of many voluntary organizations are not touched by the federal government in a meaningful way, beyond requirements associated with charitable registration, and thus see the Accord as peripheral to their core interests which are more likely to be funded by provincial or territorial governments.

In England, the NCVO clearly has held, and continues to hold, the voice for the voluntary sector and is a lead participant in many sectoral policy issues (NCVO, 2004). The NCVO is well resourced by the government and its members to provide both technical support to organizations and a strong policy and research voice for the sector (NCVO, 2005a). The NCVO has played a leading role in supporting the implementation of the Compact, educating the sector, and advocating for its implementation both nationally and locally (NCVO, 2004).

The issue of sectoral representation is one of the dividing lines in the policy landscape in Canada and England. In England representatives of umbrella organizations are viewed as holding the collective voice for the whole sector, providing legitimacy and responsibility to their deliberations and are recognized as such by the central government. In Canada, however, the federal government only officially recognized individuals as being 'representative' of the voluntary sector, without the legitimacy to speak for, or represent a broader constituency (Phillips, 2003). This lack of voice and legitimacy, in Phillips' view, is an Achilles heel in progress of voluntary sector-government relations (Phillips, 2005b). In addition, the federal government has allocated no sustainable resource base for the sector to organize and represent itself.

Support from Legislators

There is also a significant difference in the policy context in which the voluntary sectors operate in Canada and England. A series of dedicated and enthusiastic ministers for the voluntary sector in England have served to maintain a strong political profile for the sector (Etherington, 2005). NCVO's Parliamentary Team co-ordinates on-going relations with, and deputations to, both houses of parliament; and an MP secondment scheme where an MP is 'seconded' to a voluntary organization, followed by appropriate recognition from the program patron, the Speaker of the House (NCVO, 2005b).

A line department of the federal government in Canada [Social Development Canada] has been given the lead for horizontal implementation, which itself has major policy priorities unrelated to, and disconnected from, the voluntary sector; and no hierarchical relationship to other departments with leading roles with respect to the voluntary sector (SDC, 2005a).

The concerns of the voluntary sector-at-large are largely invisible to federal MPs, and rarely are deputations or targeted events orchestrated outside standing committee hearings. In spite of the fact that Canada's voluntary sector, as a percentage of its active work force, is the second largest in the world (after the Netherlands), the federal government has no dedicated minister who responsible for the voluntary sector (Hall et al., 2005). A further challenge facing the status of the Accord is that [former liberal Prime Minister] Jean Chrétien signed the Accord, it did neither had all party support nor was introduced to the House of Commons, and thus subsequent governments – even Liberal ones—may wish to distance themselves from it (Brock, 2004b). According to Phillips, the fact that the Accord does not need to be tabled with a committee or Parliament was a fundamental mistake and greatly weakens its implementation (Phillips, 2005b)

In England, The Home Office's Active Community Directorate, under the auspices of the Home Secretary, co-ordinates Government Department's work on the Compact and promotes its scope across Government including Government Offices for the Regions, Executive Agencies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs). The Compact Advocacy Programme, combined with

reports to Parliament, provide England with two important indicators of transparency and compliance. In addition, the NCVO and others on the Compact Working Group play a key watchdog role and monitor Compact compliance.

Policy Outputs

Policies will go a long way toward implementation if the Codes, in this context, are consistent with the policy agreement; the target groups comply with the codes; there is no serious “subversion” of the policy outputs; and there is a clear causal link between the desired changes and the policy objectives.

One of the most visible by-products of these agreements to date, from a policy perspective, is the development of a number of agreed upon codes of good practice. Two codes of good practice have been developed in Canada, one pertaining to Policy Dialogue, the other to Funding (Voluntary Sector Initiative: VSI, 2005). In England, five codes of good practice have been developed. They include codes of good practice concerning Black and Minority Ethnic Groups, Community Groups, Consultation and Policy Appraisal, Funding & Procurement, and Volunteering (Compact Working Group, 2005).

The Funding/ Policy related Codes are clearly consistent with the spirit and intent of the Accord/Compact agreements, and there also is a clear link between the Codes and the desired changes and the policy objectives. While there appears to be no serious “subversion” of policy outputs, the challenge of horizontal policy implementation and competing policy demands cannot be underestimated, particularly when a relationship with the voluntary sector is critically important to some departments and virtually non-existent in others (Phillips, 2004b).

Actual impact?

Because the Accord/Compact is a policy framework, and not a statutory piece of legislation which would get translated into numerous regulations, conformity of decisions with policy objectives depends on the ability of constituency groups (e.g. Voluntary Sector Forum/ NCVO) and legislators/ senior managers who support the policy to actively intervene in the implementation process.

The degree of professional collegialism which dominates the government – social sector relations in Canada tends to slow down implementation, as incremental consensus takes over deliberations (Brock, 2004a; Phillips, 2004b; Tuohy, 1999). For example a two-year task force has been struck with government and sector representatives to bring federal policies and practices in line with the Code of Good Practice on Funding (SDC, 2005b). There are specific cases where improvements have taken place, and there is now a growing abundance of resource information for voluntary sector organizations, but there is only selected anecdotal evidence of any institutional shift (Government of Canada, 2003; Government of Canada, 2004; Voluntary Sector Forum, 2003; Voluntary Sector Forum, 2004; Patten et al., 2003; Patten et al., 2004). Further movement will depend as much on the desire of the federal government to sustain the terms of their relationship with the voluntary sector, as it will on the capacity of the voluntary sector to clearly and consistently hold the federal government accountable (Johnston, 2005).

The mainstreaming of the voluntary sector in England was a key means for Blair to deliver on his ‘Third Way’ themes of liberalized public service delivery and civil renewal (Elson, 2004; Giddens, 1998; Kendall, 2000; Phillips, 2002). This close relationship between the voluntary sector and core government policies has been a critical factor in the development and maintenance of a strong policy and political relationship. It is a reflection of the degree of support for the Compact and voluntary sector that a cross-cutting review took place in 2002, a number of

progressive policy documents have been generated by the Active Communities Unit and that local government relations with the sector over a period of four years has resulted in almost 98 percent of the 388 local authorities either have or are negotiating local compacts (Compact, 2005b; HM Treasury, 2005).

Politicians may be more interested in the perceived impact on the government-at-large, individual departments and key constituency groups. In this context, Blair's "Third Way" agenda is continuing to push the voluntary sector role in public service delivery while NCVO and others are also working to revive the civil renewal agenda (Etherington, 2005). The Accord has had little political visibility in Canada since its signing in 2001.

The impact on individual voluntary organizations is likely as wide as variances in the capacity of the organizations themselves and the commitment of their corresponding government departments. In this context, the importance of the role of intermediary organizations like NCVO in England, and the Voluntary Sector Forum or Imagine Canada, come to the fore as voices for the sector and a means to systematically monitor practices (Brock, 2004b; Phillips, 2004b).

Conclusion

This PIF model focuses on the 'top-down' dimension of policy implementation, providing a framework to examine in considerable detail the material variables which contextualize the key policy parameters; the structural variables which influence its launch and adoption; and the contextual variables which provide sustain or diminish its implementation. Future use of this model will need to consider the impact of horizontality and related bilateral issues on policy implementation. Without such a consideration the impact of these two variables could be over or under estimated.

The Policy Implementation Framework serves a number of purposes. It provides a means to clearly identify and analyze the leading independent variables and their impact on both the formation and implementation of policy, particularly where it is the implementation of the policy which is the focus, rather than an analysis of policy processes. It also provides, in this particular case, a means to compare the policy implementation trajectories of two policies which, while similar in philosophy, operate in two different political contexts, and could be extended to others.

This research introduces an opportunity to start to explore the implementation of bilateral government-voluntary sector agreements in the full light of day. Without making direct causal claims, the PIF does add to our understanding of the implementation of Accord/Compact agreements while providing a new means to systematically monitor their progress over time.

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Endnotes

ⁱ A planned re-configuration of the Voluntary Sector Forum is much more inclusive than was previously the case and the recent emergence of Imagine Canada has established a policy presence in Ottawa. However, chronic under-funding of many voluntary organizations continues to undermine their capacity to participate in, or pro-actively lead, collective sector-centered policy discussions.