Public Policy and Implementation in Canada – Rethinking the implementation gap

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What is the implementation gap?

- Grounded in deficit thinking (what don't we have?)

- Grounded in deficit reduction logic

- Is often seen as either overtly political (will) or capacity (action) issue

- Speaks to the 21st Century context of complexity, devolution, integration and collaboration

What is this presentation about?

1. Are we in a "4th Generation" of implementation research?
   - Wicked problems
   - Policy failure
   - Complexity of integration

2. How do we balance program evaluation (typically presented as results/outputs) with outcomes?

3. What factors are shaping/driving the way we select and implement policy tools?

What is the current context for implementation?

- Generally:
  - Lots of implementation happens every day at multiple scales
  - Does implementation align with will (ie, fidelity)?
    - What will is manifested?
  - Policy is still problem-solving, but "1 step removed"
    - Contracts, grants and "capacity-building programs"
    - Point to a different role for the state

Shifting paradigm for public policy

Modern Paradigm	21st Century (Neoliberal) Paradigm
Conflict (dichotomies)	Ambiguity
Hierarchy	De-centralization
Representative democracy	Network governance
State-based policy	Distributed/contracted interventions
Problem-solving (linear)	Adaptive but shorter-term

What's the core problem?

- What is implementation?
1. Desire
2. Action
3. Fidelity
- What is the issue at hand?
1. Desire is not homogenous
2. Action is variable in intent, duration, effect and scope
3. Fidelity to which desire?

Leads to a core distinction in how we think about implementation

1. Performance-based assessments of implementation (PIE)
    1. Assume design and action are identical
    2. May assume design is static
    3. Presents fidelity as linear and static (checklist)
2. Conformance-based assessments of implementation (CIE)
    1. Assumes design and action can differ, but align normatively
    2. Assumes a different role for design
    3. Presents fidelity as a normative, rather than empirical question (eg. Alignment rather than compliance)

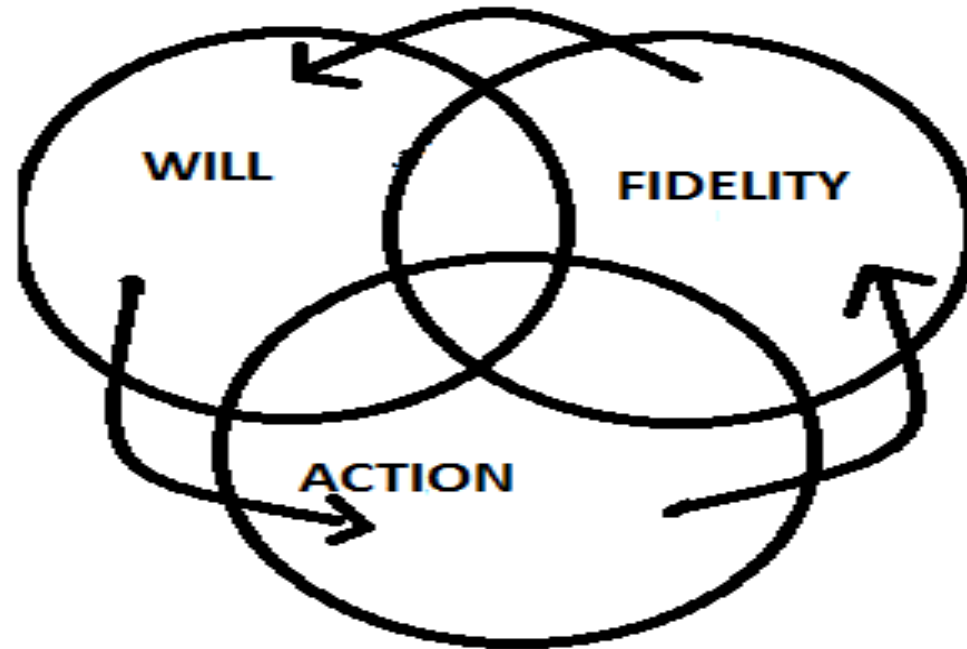# Raises some interesting questions about our assumptions for:

1. The policy process
2. The knowledge transfer process
3. Evidence and Problem-solving
4. The role for policy and implementation design
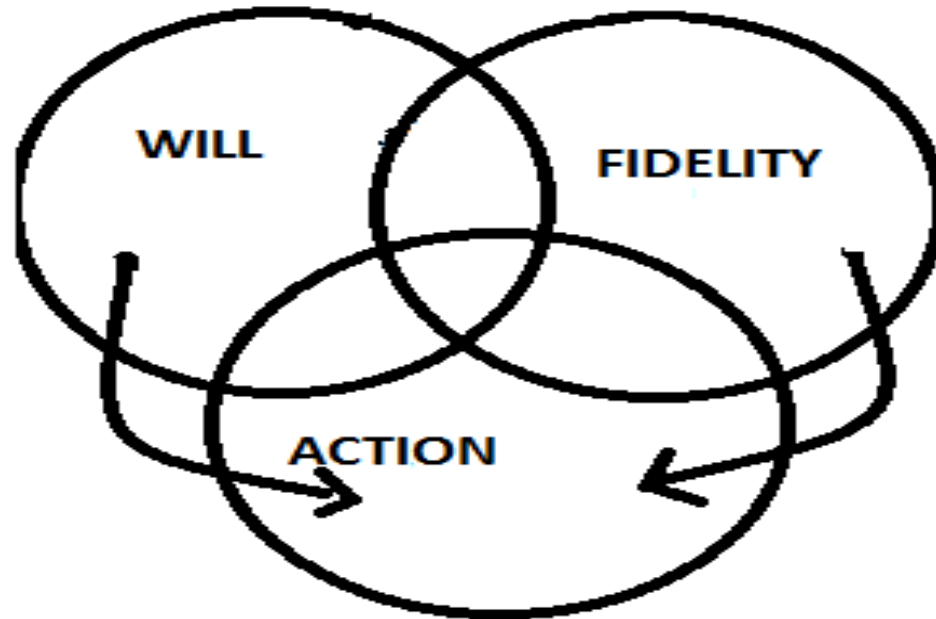
Policy process 1.0
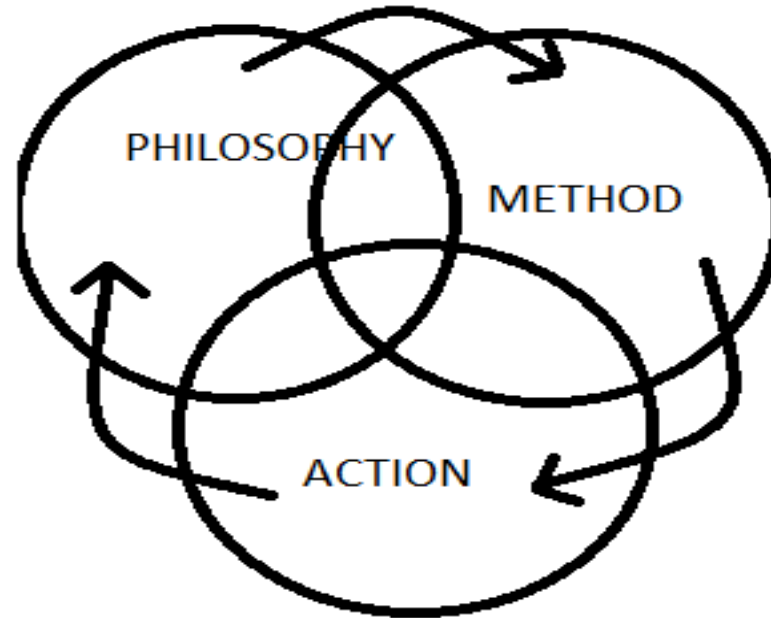
POLICY PROCESS 1.0

Implementation Process (Conformance)

Implementation Process (Performance)

Where is the implementation gap?

Hinges on different core questions:

1. What is our operational emphasis?
    1. Bureaucratic v. technocratic v. "democratic"

2. What is our procedural course?
    1. Performance v. conformance

3. What is our expectation of design?

4. What is our expectation of knowledge and evaluation?

Answers to those questions present the core challenges to implementation

1. How do we incorporate design and adaptation into policy AND implementation (ie, plan for goals and implementation together)
    1. What is the role for values? (Policy design)
2. What are our (often implicit) expectations of what public policy will "do"?
3. How do we design for unanticipated consequences and complex systems?
4. How do we factor in competition as part of a new policy paradigm?

Implications…

Particularly for rural communities/regions:

1. "Capacity building" needs to include both decision-making and implementation

2. "Capacity building" also entails capacity to compete

3. $$$ does not automatically equal capacity, BUT…

Capacity to compete

- Cash can purchase capacity
- What is that capacity for?
  - Rural concerns often hinge on autonomy
- Capacity to compete and survive requires design through-out the policy process
- What implementation entails and how it is framed/approached needs to be part of the initial "Theory of Change"

View implementation as

1. Action based upon design and purpose
2. A causal factor in, and of, itself
3. A medium that creates effects as a process, an action and a political tool
4. A part of a broader "game" and pattern of governing
5. Neither a default, nor a benign undertaking

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