

The Phenomenon of "Policy Idling" in the Implementation of Public Policies and Its Governance Path

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Abstract

This article focuses on the phenomenon of "policy idling" in the implementation of public policies. By deeply analyzing its connotation, manifestations, causes and hazards, and combining practical cases with relevant theories, it explores effective governance paths. Research has found that the phenomenon of "policy idling" is quite common in the process of policy implementation, seriously affecting the realization of policy goals and the protection of public interests. To address this phenomenon, it is necessary to start from multiple aspects such as improving policy formulation, optimizing the implementation subjects, strengthening supervision and evaluation, and creating a favorable implementation environment, to build a comprehensive and multi-level governance system, so as to enhance the implementation efficiency of public policies and ensure their effective implementation.

Key words: Implementation of public policies; Policy idling; Governance path.

1. Introduction

Public policies, as an important means for the government to govern society, allocate resources and achieve public interests, the quality of their formulation and implementation is directly related to the effectiveness of social development and the well-being of the people. Policymaking is the foundation, while policy implementation is the key link, which is the process of transforming policy goals into practical achievements^[1]. However, in the practice of public policy implementation, the phenomenon of "policy idling" occurs from time to time, that is, policies are not effectively implemented during the implementation process, resulting in situations where they are formally implemented but not actually implemented or not implemented properly, leading to the failure to achieve policy goals and a significant reduction in policy effectiveness. The behavior and attitude of grassroots policy implementations have a crucial impact on the effectiveness of policy implementation. The phenomenon of "policy idling" to some extent reflects the problems existing in the grassroots implementation link^[2]. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to conduct in-depth research on the phenomenon of "policy idling" in the implementation of public policies and its governance paths. Effective research on policy implementation is crucial for enhancing the government's governance capacity and ensuring the achievement of policy goals. However, "policy idling" as a negative phenomenon in policy implementation urgently needs in-depth analysis^[3].

2. The Connotation and Manifestations of the Phenomenon of "Policy Idling" in the Implementation of Public Policies

2.1 The Connotation of the "Policy Idle Rotation" Phenomenon

"Policy idleness" refers to a phenomenon where, during the implementation of public policies, due to the influence of various factors, the policies fail to be effectively implemented as expected in accordance with the design and requirements. They merely remain at the surface level of document transmission, meeting deployment, etc., without truly being transformed into actual actions and effects, and the policy goals cannot be achieved. It is a manifestation of policy implementation deviation, in contrast to the effective implementation of policies, reflecting the inefficient, ineffective or even negative state in the policy implementation process. The implementation of policies requires specific organizational structures and operational mechanisms to be guaranteed. When these elements are missing or malfunction, it is easy for policy implementation deviations to occur, such as "policy idling". This provides an organizational-level perspective for us to understand the connotation of the "policy idling" phenomenon^[4].

2.2 Manifestations of the "Policy Idle Rotation" Phenomenon

2.2.1 Symbolic Execution

During the policy implementation process, the implementing entity merely makes superficial gestures to enforce the policy, such as holding meetings or issuing documents, but in reality, it does not take specific actions to implement the policy content. For instance, after receiving the policy requirements on environmental protection from the higher authorities, some local governments merely organized a few large-scale environmental protection publicity activities and issued relevant policy documents. However, they failed to take effective supervision and rectification measures for actual problems such as enterprises' illegal emissions, resulting in no substantial improvement in environmental quality. For instance, in the case of "ritualistic enforcement" ^[5], the enforcement subject pays more attention to the formal presentation and neglects the core goals and actual effects of the policy, making the policy merely a superficial effort.

2.2.2 Selective Execution

The implementing entity selectively implements the policy content based on its own interest preferences and actual needs, only implementing the parts that are beneficial to it while ignoring or refusing to implement the parts that are unfavorable to it. The interest game in policy implementation is an important cause of selective implementation. When the implementing subjects weigh their own interests and policy goals, they often choose implementation methods that are beneficial to themselves, thus triggering the problem of selective implementation in the "policy idle rotation" ^[6]. For instance, when implementing the policy of educational equity, some schools, in pursuit of college admission rates and reputation, only focus on the cultivation and resource investment of outstanding students, while neglecting the assistance and support for students with learning difficulties, which goes against the original intention of educational equity.

2.2.3 Alternative Execution

When implementing a policy, the implementing entity uses other policies or measures it has formulated to replace the original policy, resulting in the failure to achieve the goals of the original policy. This situation is usually due to the misunderstanding of the original policy by the implementing entity or actions taken for purposes such as local protectionism. A balance needs to be struck between local autonomy and the uniformity of central policies in policy implementation. When localities overly emphasize autonomy while neglecting the policy intentions of the central government, alternative implementation is likely to occur, leading to "policy idling" ^[7]. For instance, some local governments, in order to protect local enterprises, have formulated a series of local regulations and standards when implementing the national policies on market access and competition, setting unreasonable thresholds for enterprises from other places and hindering fair market competition.

2.2.4 Perfunctory Execution

During the process of policy implementation, the implementing entities have been perfunctory in dealing with policy requirements, lacking a serious working attitude and insufficient enforcement efforts, resulting in poor policy implementation effects. The sense of responsibility and work attitude of grassroots enforcement personnel have a direct impact on the effect of policy implementation. Perfunctory implementation reflects the negative attitude of grassroots enforcement personnel during the policy implementation process and is a common manifestation of "policy idling" ^[8]. For instance, when implementing poverty alleviation policies, some grassroots cadres did not go deep into poor families to understand the actual situation. They simply distributed poverty alleviation funds based on statistical data without formulating personalized assistance measures for the causes of poverty in poor families, which made it difficult for poverty alleviation work to achieve long-term results.

3. Analysis of the Causes of the "Policy Idle Rotation" Phenomenon in the Implementation of Public Policies

3.1 Policy Formulation Level

If there is a lack of sufficient research and argumentation during the policy-making process, the understanding of the actual situation is not in-depth, the policy goals are set too high or too low, and the policy measures lack pertinence and operability, it will lead to difficulty in implementing the policies during the execution process. For instance, when some cities formulate policies to address traffic congestion, they fail to fully take into account factors such as the city's traffic flow, road layout, and the development level of public transportation. The policy measures they propose are overly idealistic and thus unable to effectively solve the actual problems.

If the policy text contains unclear expressions or ambiguous meanings, it is easy for the implementing entity to have a misunderstanding of the policy, thereby affecting the implementation effect of the policy. For instance, some policy documents use vague terms such as "appropriate" and "a certain proportion", without clear and specific standards and requirements. This leads to the fact that the implementing entities act independently during the implementation process, making it difficult for policies to be uniformly implemented.

3.2 At the Level of the Executing Entity

3.2.1 Driven by the Interests of the Implementing Entity

As rational economic agents, the implementing subjects often pursue the maximization of their own interests in the process of policy implementation. When policy goals are inconsistent with their own interests, the implementing entities may adopt various means to distort policy implementation in order to achieve their own interests. For instance, when some government departments implement industrial policies, in pursuit of departmental interests or local fiscal revenue, they give special treatment to enterprises that do not meet the requirements of industrial policies, which makes it difficult for industrial structure adjustment policies to be effectively implemented.

3.2.2 Insufficient Capacity of the Implementing Entity

The implementation of policies requires the implementing entities to possess certain professional knowledge, skills and management capabilities. If the implementing entity lacks the corresponding ability and quality, it will be unable to correctly understand and grasp the spirit of the policy, and it will be difficult to formulate a scientific and reasonable implementation plan. Various problems will also arise during the implementation process, affecting the implementation effect of the policy. For instance, some grassroots cadres, when implementing the rural land transfer policy, due to their unfamiliarity with relevant laws, regulations and policy provisions, have engaged in non-standard behaviors when guiding farmers in land transfer, which has led to problems such as land disputes.

3.2.3 The Attitude of the Implementing Entity is Not Correct

Some of the implementing entities lack a correct understanding and sense of responsibility towards the policy implementation work, and their working attitudes are passive, negligent and perfunctory. They believe that policy implementation is merely a formality and do not care whether the policy goals can be achieved. In their work, there are phenomena such as buck-passing, procrastination and slackness, which lead to slow progress in policy implementation and even makes it impossible to implement.

3.3 Supervision and Evaluation Level

3.3.1 The Supervision Mechanism is Not Perfect

At present, there are still some loopholes and deficiencies in the supervision mechanism for the implementation of public policies in our country. Problems such as a single supervision subject, a single supervision method, and insufficient supervision intensity are quite prominent. Some supervisory departments have interest ties with the enforcement departments, lack independence and authority, and thus find it difficult to effectively supervise the implementation of policies. Meanwhile, the unsmooth channels for social supervision and the low enthusiasm of the public to participate in supervision also make it difficult for violations during the policy implementation process to be discovered and corrected in a timely manner.

3.3.2 The Evaluation Indicators Are Not Scientific

Policy evaluation is an important means to test the effectiveness of policy implementation. However, at present, the policy evaluation index system in our country is still not perfect. The setting of evaluation indicators is not scientific or reasonable. It often pays too much attention to the form and process of policy implementation, while neglecting the degree of achievement and actual effect of policy goals. For instance, when evaluating some environmental protection policies, the main focus is on indicators such as the investment amount and construction scale of environmental protection projects, while insufficient attention is paid to core indicators such as the improvement of environmental quality and the increase in public satisfaction with the environment, resulting in the assessment results not truly reflecting the implementation effect of the policies.

3.4 Execution Environment Level

3.4.1 Social and Cultural Environmental Impact

The social and cultural environment has a subtle influence on the implementation of policies. In some regions, there are constraints from traditional concepts and customs. People's recognition and acceptance of policies are relatively low, and they are reluctant to cooperate with the implementation of policies. For instance, in some rural areas, due to the influence of traditional fertility concepts, some people have a resistant attitude towards the family planning policy, which makes the implementation of the policy rather difficult.

3.4.2 Resource and Environmental Constraints

The implementation of policies requires sufficient human, material and financial resources to support them. If resources are in short supply, it will affect the progress and quality of policy implementation. For instance, when implementing medical and health policies, if primary-level medical institutions lack necessary medical equipment and professional talents, they will be unable to provide high-quality medical services to the public, and the policy goals will also be difficult to achieve.

4. The Harm of the Phenomenon of "Policy Idling" in the Implementation of Public Policies

4.1 Damaging the Government's Credibility

The government fulfills its responsibility of managing society and serving the public by formulating and implementing public policies. When policies experience "idling" and fail to achieve the expected goals, the public will question the government's governance capacity and integrity, and their trust in the government will decline. If this situation persists, the credibility of the government will be seriously undermined, affecting the good relationship between the government and the public and being detrimental to the development of various government tasks.

4.2 Wasting Policy Resources

The formulation and implementation of policies require a significant investment of human, material and financial resources. The "idle rotation" of policies means that these resources have not been effectively utilized, resulting in a waste of resources. For instance, in order to implement a certain industrial support policy, the government has invested a large amount of funds in building industrial parks and providing subsidies, etc. However, due to the inadequate implementation of the policy, the enterprise occupancy rate in the industrial parks is low, and the industrial development has not achieved the expected results, resulting in the funds and resources invested in the early stage being wasted.

4.3 Hindering Social Development and Progress

The purpose of public policy is to solve social problems and promote social fairness, justice and development. The "idle rotation" of policies makes social problems fail to be effectively solved and may even deteriorate further, hindering the normal development of society. For instance, when environmental protection policies are not effectively implemented, environmental pollution problems will become increasingly serious, causing greater harm to the ecological environment and public health, and affecting the sustainable development of society.

4.4 Factors that Trigger Social Conflicts and Instability

When there are deviations in policy implementation, with some groups benefiting while others suffer losses, it is easy to trigger social conflicts and contradictions. For instance, during the implementation of land expropriation compensation policies, if the compensation standards are unreasonable and the enforcement is unfair, it will trigger dissatisfaction and protests from farmers whose land is expropriated, affecting social stability and harmony.

5. Governance Paths for the Phenomenon of "Policy Idling" in the Implementation of Public Policies

5.1 Improve Policy Formulation and Enhance Policy Quality

Before formulating policies, in-depth investigations and research should be carried out to fully understand the actual situation and the interests and demands of all parties, and to obtain first-hand information. By using scientific methods and means to analyze and verify the research data, the rationality and feasibility of policy goals are ensured, and the policy measures are targeted and operational. For instance, when formulating urban traffic planning policies, it is necessary to fully consider factors such as the city's traffic flow, population distribution, and economic development level. Through

methods like traffic model simulation and expert argumentation, a scientific and reasonable traffic planning scheme should be developed.

Policy texts should be expressed clearly and accurately, avoiding the use of vague words and ambiguous sentences. The goals, tasks, measures and standards of the policy should be elaborated in detail to ensure that the implementing entities can accurately understand and grasp the spirit of the policy and guarantee that the policy does not deviate during the implementation process. For instance, when formulating tax preferential policies, it is necessary to clearly define the objects, scope, standards and duration of the benefits, etc., to avoid misunderstandings during the implementation process.

5.2 Optimize the Execution Subjects and Enhance the Execution Capabilities

Establish and improve interest coordination mechanism to balance the interest relations of the implementing subjects during the policy implementation process. Through reasonable interest compensation and incentive mechanisms, guide the implementing entities to establish a correct view of interests, combine policy goals with their own interests, and enhance their enthusiasm and initiative in implementing policies. For instance, when conducting performance appraisals of local governments, the effectiveness of policy implementation should be incorporated into the assessment index system and linked to local fiscal revenue, cadre promotion, etc., to encourage local governments to actively implement policies.

Strengthen the training and education of the implementing entities to enhance their professional knowledge, business skills and overall quality. By conducting policy interpretation training, business skills training, management ability training, etc., the implementing entities can accurately understand and grasp the policy requirements, master scientific implementation methods and skills, and improve the quality and efficiency of policy implementation. For instance, regularly organize grassroots cadres to participate in policy and regulation training, business skills competitions and other activities to enhance their policy implementation capabilities.

Strengthen ideological education for the executive subjects, guide them to establish correct values and professional outlooks, and enhance their sense of responsibility and mission. Establish and improve the work responsibility system and accountability system, seriously hold accountable the implementing entities that fail to effectively implement policies, and form an effective restraint mechanism to prompt the implementing entities to earnestly fulfill their duties and actively implement policies. For instance, officials who are perfunctory and shirk their responsibilities during the implementation of policies should be criticized, educated and subject to disciplinary action. Those with serious circumstances should be removed from their positions.

5.3 Strengthen Supervision and Evaluation to Ensure the Effectiveness of Policy Implementation

Establish and improve a diversified supervision system, and enhance the coordinated cooperation among the supervision of the People's Congress, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, judicial supervision, administrative supervision and social supervision. Clarify the responsibilities and authorities of each supervisory entity to form a supervisory synergy. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the supervision and management of the supervisory departments to ensure their independence and authority. For instance, a supervision information sharing platform should be established to facilitate information exchange and resource sharing among various supervision entities, thereby enhancing supervision efficiency.

Establish a scientific and reasonable policy evaluation index system, taking into account multiple aspects such as policy goals, implementation processes, and actual effects comprehensively. The assessment indicators should be quantifiable and operational, and truly reflect the implementation effect of the policy. For instance, when evaluating educational policies, in addition to paying attention to indicators such as educational funding input and the scale of school construction, it is also necessary to focus on core indicators such as the improvement of students' comprehensive qualities and the degree of educational equity.

Take the results of policy assessment as an important basis for policy adjustment, improvement and accountability. Commend and reward policy implementation entities with excellent assessment results, urge those that fail to meet the standards to rectify, and hold accountable those with serious problems. By strengthening the application of assessment results, a closed-loop management of policy implementation can be formed to continuously improve the quality and effectiveness of policy implementation.

5.4 Create a Favorable Implementation Environment to Promote the Effective Implementation of Policies

Through various channels and methods, widely publicize the content and significance of the policy, enhance the public's awareness and understanding of the policy, and strengthen the public's recognition and support for the policy. For instance,

by making use of media platforms such as television, newspapers and the Internet, policy interpretation columns can be set up, and experts and scholars can be invited to provide in-depth interpretations of policies. Organize and carry out policy promotion activities in communities, enterprises and rural areas, and answer the public's questions face to face.

In accordance with the needs of policy implementation, human, material and financial resources should be rationally allocated to ensure that there is sufficient resource support for policy implementation. Increase resource input for the implementation of policies at the grassroots level and enhance the resource guarantee level of grassroots implementation entities. For instance, when implementing medical and health policies, increasing financial investment in primary medical institutions, improving medical facilities and conditions, introducing professional talents, and enhancing the capacity of primary medical services.

Strengthen social and cultural construction, cultivate citizens' awareness of the rule of law, responsibility and cooperation, and create a favorable social and cultural atmosphere. By carrying out legal publicity and education activities, volunteer service activities, etc., we guide the public to establish correct values and behavioral norms, actively cooperate with policy implementation, and form a favorable situation where the whole society participates in policy implementation together.

6. Conclusion

The phenomenon of "policy idling" in the implementation of public policies is a complex social issue. Its emergence is the result of the combined effect of multiple factors such as policy formulation, implementation subjects, supervision and evaluation, and implementation environment. The phenomenon of "policy idling" not only undermines the government's credibility and wastes policy resources, but also hinders social development and progress, and triggers social conflicts and unstable factors. Therefore, effective measures must be taken to govern it. By adopting a comprehensive governance approach that encompasses multiple aspects such as improving policy formulation, optimizing implementation subjects, strengthening supervision and evaluation, and creating a favorable implementation environment, a comprehensive and multi-level governance system can be constructed. This can effectively enhance the efficiency of public policy implementation, ensure the effective implementation of policies, achieve policy goals, safeguard public interests, and promote social fairness, justice, and sustainable development. In the future policy implementation practice, it is still necessary to constantly summarize experiences and lessons, and continuously improve governance methods and means to adapt to the constantly changing social environment and policy demands.

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