
A SPLASH IN THE PAN OR A SCRUM TO SUCCEED? IMPLEMENTING CLUBMARK: TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP PERSPECTIVES

Submitting author: Mr Alex Thurston
Loughborough University, School of Sport, Exercise & Health Sciences
Loughborough, LE11 3TU
United Kingdom

All authors: Alex Thurston (corresp)

Type: Scientific
Category: 12: Sport Policy

Abstract

The UK government regularly formulates new strategies that increasingly use national governing bodies (NGBs), sport clubs, schools, or a combination of the three as vehicles to deliver and implement policies or programmes. Policy makers are predominantly centrally located who are often a distance from the point of delivery where, it is argued, the environment is political and open to negotiation and interpretation, which can affect implementation. Unfortunately, the majority of public policy studies have tended to focus on the agenda setting stage of the policy process that has resulted in a comparative shortfall of studies for the important implementation stage.

The aim of this PhD study is to analyse the role of NGBs and community sport clubs in the process of policy implementation with case studies from three sports: swimming (the sport with the highest participation in the UK); rugby union (perceived as a middle-class sport); and boxing (perceived as a working class/lower income sport). Many NGBs tailor Sport England's generic Clubmark framework (a quality mark) to its specific sport. Clubmark is a cross sport accreditation scheme for community sport clubs that places focus on junior and youth sections of a club. The scheme is designed for club development to ensure a club provides the best possible experience for its members. Although it is not a requirement for clubs to adopt Clubmark, Local Authorities and successfully accredited clubs add pressure on non-accredited clubs to work towards achieving Clubmark status.

Data collection is in progress. The data consists of semi-structured interviews (with four or five NGB officials and five to eight sport club volunteers from two clubs in each sport) and policy documentation. Each interview is transcribed, then thematically coded applying Hogwood & Gunn's (1984) 'ten preconditions for perfect implementation' to guide initial analysis. Subsequently, appropriate theoretical frameworks, such

as Matland's (1995) synthesis of classical top-down and bottom up approaches for implementation analysis, and Kingdon's (1997) multiple streams model provide greater analysis.

Preliminary findings from swimming and rugby union case studies reveal that implementing Clubmark in both sports is not straightforward; the NGBs have had to adapt Clubmark criteria to meet the requirements of clubs and the constraints of the club environments. Boxing interviews are yet to commence (the conference presentation will focus on the first two case studies).

Initial analysis of the swimming case study data suggests that the implementation of swim21 (swimming's Clubmark) should not be classified as a failed or unsuccessful implementation attempt. Rather, a more generous view would suggest that difficulties experienced by some clubs during implementation of swim21 were a catalyst for change. Given that the implementation process, in some cases, took a considerable amount of time greater than the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) had anticipated, and/or elements of the original tiered accreditation system were not applicable to all clubs working towards swim21, these such issues in fact set an agenda for modernisation. Even if all five major revisions of swim21 (since the introduction in 2002) was not the initial intention of the ASA's implementation strategy, it demonstrates that the ASA are willing to accept feedback from clubs and more importantly, act on the information received in an attempt to achieve policy implementation to as near to perfect as possible.

Preliminary analysis of the rugby case study data follows a similar trend to swimming, except the response of rugby's NGB to Clubmark implementation difficulties in comparison, were more drastic. The most common feedback the Rugby Football Union (RFU) received from affiliated clubs was that the Seal of Approval (SoA) accreditation (the RFU's Clubmark) was far too onerous and gaining accreditation detracted from the core purpose of a rugby club; providing a safe and effective environment for their members. Furthermore, the SoA criteria was not relevant for many clubs; senior and veteran sections of clubs were neglected. The outcome of this feedback was that the RFU designed a simplified (compared with SoA) quality mark termed Club Accreditation (CA). Importantly, since introducing the new accreditation, Sport England accepted that CA is considered equivalent to Clubmark.

Interview data analysis suggests that an 11th precondition, added to Hogwood & Gunn's list, would offer greater support for successful implementation: there is a support structure available which would reinforce the top-down approach of implementation. That is, there is 'capacity building' support (through Aquatic Officers (AOs) and Rugby Development Officers (RDOs)) which, strengthens implementation of new policies in clubs. This support structure ties in with the summative and formative assessment literature.

References

Hogwood, B. W., & Gunn, L. A. (1984). *Policy Analysis for the Real World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kingdon, J. W. (1997). *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (2nd ed.). California: Harpercollins.

Matland, R. E. (1995). Synthesizing the Implementation Literature: The Ambiguity-Conflict Model of Policy Implementation. *J. Public Adm. Res. Theory.*, 5(2), 145–174.