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Methods Used in Public Policy Decision Making by County Managers in North Carolina

Jeffrey Bryan Gowen
Walden University

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Walden University

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Jeffrey Gowen

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Walden University
2015

Abstract

Methods Used in Public Policy Decision Making

by County Managers in North Carolina

by

Jeffrey B. Gowen

MA, Webster University, 1996

BS, United States Air Force Academy, 1979

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy Administration

Walden University

February 2015

Abstract

Researchers have examined ways in which policy makers develop their decisions. The literature has not explored, however, the methodologies used by county managers to arrive at decisions, or whether they consider the medium- and long-term policy implications, or second and third order effects, of those decisions. The purpose of this study was to identify the methodologies and decision-making processes used by county managers in North Carolina. The theoretical framework was Lindblom's theory of incrementalism in decision making. Data for this phenomenological study were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 purposefully selected county managers, and were coded and categorized to identify themes and patterns. Results indicated that county managers tended to rely on multiple methodologies, rather than one consistent methodology, when deciding public policy issues, and that they overwhelmingly considered the second and third order effects of their decisions on public policy outcomes. The implications for positive social change include informing county managers and the public about policy decisions and their effects on the long-term well-being of their local community.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Public policy practitioners are often charged with developing public policy plans, programs, policies, and decisions (public policy actions) that will have an effect on citizens in the geographical area served by the practitioner, if not beyond. When forming public policy actions, it is not known if public policy practitioners base their decision on the effects they will have on the citizenry. These practitioners may act without fully considering the magnitude and repercussions of the action (e.g., second and third order effects), or they may make decisions that affect the people they serve and fully consider not only the intended consequences but also the unintended consequences (the second and third order effects). How public policy decisions are made and whether the policy's or action's effects are considered in the decision making process is the focus of this study.

This study has a positive social change implication by identifying decision making methods being used by public policy decision makers in several counties in North Carolina. I determined if decision makers take into account the effects of their decisions, contrary to what the literature states. These effects go beyond the intended effect (first order effect) of the decision to include second and third order effects (i.e., unintended consequences that impact citizens).

This chapter is the background of the problem, the problem statement and the purpose of the study. It presents the nature of the study; the definitions used in the study; assumptions, scope, and delimitations; limitations; and the significance of the study.

Background

Lindblom (1959) describes an approach to public policy decision making, in which policy goals are limited, with decisions or actions undertaken to move towards accomplishing a goal and then another goal. This method is incrementalism, a solution solving one problem and then another solution moving towards more results. Later Lindblom (1979) refined his view on incrementalism by offering three different types of analysis for use when confronted with the need to make a policy decision.

Researchers such as Hastak, Mazis, and Morris (2001); Howard (2005), Gregory, Fischhoff, and McDaniels (2005); Paez, Williamson, and Bishop (2006); Jain, Ramamurthy, and Sundaram (2006); and Qi and Altinakar (2011) showed that public policy, that is, plans, programs, policies, and decisions; collectively public policy actions, are being made by public policy practitioners without consideration of second and third order effects of their public policy action. The politicians want short-term results (e.g., before the next election. The citizen wants the problem they are facing solved, or a decision made that has a positive benefit to them (e.g., a new centrally located recreation center) to address a need the citizen has, real or perceived.

In responding to the politician, public servants can either serve the people or make things worse. As an example, a county manager must fund the payroll of the county

employees, while at the same time replacing equipment and providing services for the citizens of the county. The way the manager balances the decisions they make does affect those they serve. The decisions made to alleviate a problem, may cause other problems if the original decision does not consider second and third order effects as part of its implementation process.

While there are methods being used to make public policy decisions, there is not a standard methodology, nor is there a methodology that compels decision makers to determine effects of the policy. Hastak et al (2001) and Howard (2005) articulated the need for public policy practitioners to have a decision making methodology. Gregory et al (2005); Paez et al (2006); Jain et al (2006); and Qi and Altinakar (2011) showed that methods such as cost benefit analysis (CBA), group decision support systems (GDSS), “what’s the price” (WTP) surveys, and civilian and decision maker joint participation groups are being used. However, these methods do not look at second order, third order, and beyond effects in the decision making process of public policy actions. Second order effects are those usually unintended effects brought about by an action, with third order effects being those effects that result from second order effects (Gowen, 2005).

Schorr (1997) examined the events leading up to President Clinton’s signing of welfare reform in 1996. Schorr posited that President Clinton lost an opportunity to make real reform and instead, bowing to opinion polls and the Republican Party, he signed the bill which capped welfare assistance to a 5-year family limit. The unintended consequences from welfare reform are that people are being trained to get a job but not

how to make a living (Schoor, 1997). Far too often, former welfare recipients bounce from one job to another, frequently without any health benefits and often-unable to meet all the needs of their family, which in many cases means children (Schoor, 1997). Schorr contended that it may cost society less to leave a person on welfare than moving them into the workplace.

Cost benefit analysis (CBA) is the most commonly used decision making method (Paez Williamson, & Bishop, 2006). In the cost benefit analysis methodology of decision making, the most heavily weighted factor is the cost, not the impact of the public policy action on citizenry. If the cost is within budget constraints, the policy will be adopted. The impact of not adopting a public policy action is not considered in CBA, as ultimately the cost of not acting, may result in a larger fiscal outlay in the future. A methodology for considering long-term effects (second and third order effects) is needed for public policy action development and decision making.

Effects-based planning identifies the desired effect(s), nodes (key players or organizations), linkages between nodes (relationships), and actions that should result in the desired effect being achieved. The identification process results in the use of resources, that is, the application of an action on a node (through linkages, or independently) to achieve the desired effect. To monitor whether or not the desired effect is being accomplished a Measure of Performance, (the overall desired result) for each desired effect is determined as are Measures of Effectiveness that show progress towards obtaining or not obtaining the Measure of Performance (JWFC Doctrine Pam 7).

Effects based Planning (EBP), “is an attempt at understanding the complex interactions between the different systems. . . system in this instance is meant to describe processes, networks, or social structures that self-integrate and often interact with other systems” (Lee & Kupersmith, 2002, p. 2). For those county managers trying to juggle payroll, replacing equipment, and providing services, an example of the EBP process could be as follows.

The desired effect is a budget that allows for funding of all essential functions at either the previous year’s level or higher. Nodes could be citizens, county commissioners, members of the federal congressional delegation, state legislators, and lobbyists (both at the state and federal level). An example of an action would be a delegation of citizens advocating a specific point of view. Resources could be that delegation meeting with their county’s congressional representative and then their state representative to argue for their point of view. Multiple nodes, actions, and resource linkages are designed to bring about the desired effect. These nodes, actions, and resource linkages are monitored for their effectiveness in achieving the desired effect, modified as needed and evaluated for their ability to impart second and third order effects (Gowen, 2005).

The literature demonstrates the need to better understand what methods are used by decision makers and whether those methods consider second and third order effects. The study showed that North Carolina county managers, serving as public policy decision makers do use a methodology when making their decisions and that the county managers do consider effects when making their policy decisions.

Problem Statement

Researchers have examined ways in which policy makers develop their decisions. Often, policy makers do not consider that their decisions and subsequent implementation may not alleviate a problem, and, in fact, causes more harm. The literature has not explored, however, the methodologies used by county managers to arrive at decisions, or whether they consider the medium- and long-term policy implications, or second and third order effects, of those decisions. Do decision makers consider effects in the development of public policy actions? This study, using historical and current public policy action decision processes, will reduce the gap of knowledge.

A review of the literature on the formulation of public policy decisions showed that public policy decision makers use multiple methods to make a decision and not a universal methodology. The literature also states that public policy decision makers do not consider the effects of their decisions. By not considering the full potential of the effects of a decision, the public policy action may cause more harm rather than alleviate a problem.

As public policy is discussed and eventually implemented there is a need for a methodology that explores the potential effects of the policy on those who will be affected by it before the policy is enacted. By researching decision making methods, it can be determined that there is, or is not a method of public policy decision making that looks at the effects, especially second and third order effects of a potential policy. Public Policy decision makers should look at the potential effects of their decisions and then as a

policy is put into place they should look at the effects to ensure the desired and intended results occur.

The literature review shows that although public policy practitioners do use methods in formulating public policy actions, these methods do not address the desired effects of the public policy action in formulation. This is a historical and current problem. The literature review presented in Chapter 2 shows that the failure of public policy practitioners to consider the effects of the public policy action is not a new problem, since there have been studies that show the need for public policy action decision making processes dating back till the mid 20th century. While the literature review addresses various public policy action decision making methods, there are no methods that address the future effects of a public policy action, thus the gap.

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this qualitative study were twofold. The first purpose was to determine what methods are being used by North Carolina's county managers as they make public policy decisions. The second purpose was to determine if North Carolina's county managers are using an effects-based methodology that allows for an analysis of potential second and third order effects of the public policy prior to the policy's enactment.

An inherent part of the study was the determination of the respondents' tenure in their position to show if a longer tenure would correspond to use of a decision making

method that considered second and third order effects. The study results add value to the knowledge of decision making at the local level.

North Carolina is a county manager state. The county managers, as a whole, are selected from a candidate pool. Once hired to the position, the county managers serve at the pleasure of their board of county commissioners, an elected body. The county manager is responsible for the operation of the county but not in all cases do they have the authority to be fully responsible. As an example, the sheriff is an elected county official who runs their own department separate from the county manager. Even so, the county managers make decisions that affect the citizens of their county.

The state has a mixture of 15 urban and 85 rural counties that present different issues to the county manager. Several of the rural counties see declining population due to higher than average unemployment, while other counties are growing due to lower than average unemployment. The fiscal problems facing the state's county commissioners are reflective of the fiscal problem that affect other states and therefore, by determining what is being done in North Carolina, a base line can be established before expanding the research to other states.

Research Questions

1. What methods are being used by public policy practitioners in county management decision making in North Carolina?
2. Do North Carolina county management decision makers consider second order and third order effects when making public policy action decisions?

3. What is the relationship, if any, between the number of years of tenure a North Carolina county decision maker has and the likelihood of their use of a formalized decision making method?

These questions were answered via interviews of county decision makers.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework of this study was Lindblom's theory of incrementalism in decision making. In this theory Lindblom (1958) stated that public policy decisions "are attempts to correct mistakes of previous policies" (p. 306). Lindblom described a policy analysis decision making system based on incrementalism, wherein one policy follows another. In this system changes are evaluated against the present situation, then as policies are implemented the expected results from each implementation is anticipated and compared to the desired result (pp 300-306).

Lindblom (1959) described two approaches to public policy decision making, one in which every possible outcome was analyzed before the policy was adopted and one in which policy goals are limited with its actions undertaken serving to move towards accomplishing the goal and then another goal. Lindblom asserted that the first method cannot be used except for simple problems since all branches and sequels to a problem cannot be considered. While ideally the second method (incrementalism) should be used Lindblom observes that it is the first method taught and used, a method that in its analysis "takes into account all "relevant factor[s]" (Lindblom 1959, p. 81).

Lindblom (1979) relooked his views on incrementalism. He offers three methods of analysis when conducting decision making. Each of these methods has its own strengths and weaknesses. What actually happens, according to Lindblom, is that while decision makers may seek to use each method as a standalone method, there are situations where one method is more appropriate than another. Lindblom, taken in total, provides a framework to evaluate public policy decision making.

Major Theoretical Propositions

The major theoretical proposition for this study was that public policy practitioners do not employ a methodology for determining either the primary effect, or the second and third order effects that a public policy action will have on the citizenry. Researchers such as Hastak et al (2001); Howard (2005); Gregory et al (2005); Paez, et al (2006); et al (2006); and Qi and Altinakar (2011) showed that there are diverse decision making methods, some in use for decades and others that are emerging into use, yet these methods do not consider effects in their application.

In the 1960s, public policy decisions were made after deliberation by agencies or organizations policy analysis divisions (Howard, 2005). These agencies analyzed the issue and developed a recommendation for the organization's leadership. However, the analysis often failed to look at how the decision was to be implemented leading to second and third order effects (Howard, 2005). Other decision makers looked to how similar public policy bodies made their decisions; a process called diffusion and then adapted that policy to their body. However, the circumstances that allowed the program policy to

work in one area may not have been the same in the other area and thus unintended effects from the policy adaption may occur (Nicholson-Crotty, 2009).

Another example is allowing the public to participate in the public policy decision making. Hastak et al. (2001) made the case for including citizens in decision making through the use of survey; with Santos and Chess (2003) making a case for involving stakeholders, those with an interest in the policy action into the decision making process, in doing so the stakeholders share in the decision. They cautioned that merely allowing interested parties into the room does not increase the feeling of participation (Santos & Chess, 2003). Although the need for decision making is addressed, researchers have not stipulated that either a method must be used, if one method is more advantageous than another or if one is more prevalent than another.

Relation to the Study Approach and Research Questions

Since the decision making methods identified in the literature review did not include mechanisms for considering effects, beyond solving the problem at hand, is there a methodology with a mechanism that does allow decision makers to consider second order and third order effects and to measure the effectiveness of the public policy action as it is enacted?

Study Concept Grounding

This investigation was based on the gap identified in the literature review. The literature review showed that there is not a common methodology used by public policy decision makers. In the same light there is not an existing algorithm that guides, or

recommends to the decision makers which decision making methodology should be used at any one particular time or for a particular decision. Thus, the decision makers are left to their own devices as to whether, or not to use a decision making method. In like manner there is not, according to the literature, a decision making methodology that addresses the consideration of effects in the decision making.

Contextual Lens

Without guidance as to a method to use, or when to use one, decision makers have used various methods and are looking to emerging methods. While the discussion on the methods is solid in the literature review, the use of decision making methodology needs to be akin to tools in a tool box. As an example, soliciting input from stakeholders may be a viable method for one type of decision, while cost benefit analysis may be used equally well for another decision. However, if the decision maker is not knowledgeable of the various methods available to them, will they become creatures of habit and use the method they are most comfortable (familiar) with regardless of the applicability of the methodology to the decision at hand?

When formulating the decision of the moment, do the decision makers look beyond the expected effects of the decision and consider second and third order effects—what in some circles are called unintended consequences? This question is not answered in the literature review that should be answered. This investigation was the first step in doing so.

Logical Connections Amongst Key Elements of the Framework

The connections in the framework consist of the various methods that are identified and discussed in the literature review. It was necessary to go back farther than 5 years in order to cover a broad period of time in public policy decision making. The older articles provide a historical understanding to what was the methods used in public policy decision making (and in some cases are still being used). The newer articles show older methods still being used, current methods and emerging trends. Combined, the articles provide an understanding of past, present, and emerging methods in public policy decision making.

Framework Relation to the Study Approach, and Key Research Questions

The research questions link the investigation frame with the literature review. By determining the linkage to the use (or lack of use) of a decision making methodology, the possible use of multiple methods, and the consideration of effects in policy determination, combined with the decision makers tenure the literature gap can begin to be filled.

Methodology

Rationale for Selection of the Design

The research method for this study was phenomenological, as envisioned by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas' use of phenomenology envisions the experiences of the participants as recorded by the researcher. In phenomenological research, the researcher seeks, through the gathering of information, to determine how experiences shape actions,

such as decision making (Smith, 2011). A researcher must place on ethnocentric blinders to remove any prejudices that may consciously or unconsciously exist (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Then through interviews, a researcher can capture the experiences of others. It is imperative though that a researcher avoid imparting bias or directing the experiences of those being interviewed. Creswell (1998) outlined a process for phenomenological research.

1. A researcher determines if the research problem is best examined using a phenomenological approach.
2. A phenomenon of interest to study is identified.
3. A researcher recognizes and specifies the broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenology.
4. A researcher recognizes and specifies the broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenology.

Data are collected from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. (pp 60-61).

The research questions were investigated by conducting interviews with county decision makers in select North Carolina counties. A relationship was established with the selected North Carolina County Managers through the following process:

1. An introductory letter was sent to each manager describing to them the purpose of the research and asking for their assistance. This was sent 3

weeks before the interview timeframe (interview window). Included in this e-mail were the interview questions and consent form.

2. A follow up e-mail was sent to the managers, essentially restating the letter and asking for a response if they were willing to be interviewed.
3. For those managers unwilling to be interviewed, another county manager was selected and sent an e-mail requesting their assistance in the research. The steps in 2 and 3 were repeated until the number of respondents was achieved.
4. One week before the interview, an e-mail was sent, thanking, in advance, the managers for their support. Included in this email were the interview questions and consent form.
5. The interviews were conducted telephonically based on the availability of the interviewee.
6. Upon approval of this research the managers will be sent a copy of the analyzed interview data, so they can see the results.

The scope of this study was several county managers in North Carolina. The reason for the selection of North Carolina, as opposed to another state was based on the fact that it is my state of residence. By selecting eight rural counties and two urban counties for this investigation the ratio of rural to urban closely replicated the ratio of rural counties to urban counties for the state as a whole.

Key Concept Being Investigated

The key concept studied was to determine if a methodology was being used by public policy practitioners in county management decision making in North Carolina. Based on the results the next concept being investigated was to determine if there is one standard methodology, or if various methods are being used by the state's county managers. Once these two items were completed another determination was made to ascertain if North Carolina county management decision makers consider second order and beyond effects when making public policy action decisions. Finally, it was assessed if the length of the tenure a North Carolina county decision maker has led to the use of a formalized methodology and consideration of effects in their decision making.

Definitions of Terms

Primary effects: Effects intended or expected to occur as a result of a public policy action (Gowen, 2005).

Public policy actions: Collective term for public policy plans, programs, policies, and decisions (Gowen, 2005).

Second order effects: Effects, usually unintended brought about by an action (Gowen, 2005).

Third order effects: Effects that result from second order effects, usually unintended effects (Gowen, 2005).

Rural: Average population density of 250 per square mile or less, as of the 2010 Census (NCRural Center, 2014).

Assumptions

The research study had the following assumptions:

1. The respondents responded with accurate information.
2. County managers make public policy action decisions.
3. It was anticipated that those public policy practitioners with training in decision making process will employ a decision making methodology when formulating public policy actions.

These assumptions were made since the accuracy of the study depended upon the accuracy of the respondents' information.

Scope and Delimitations

Scope

The scope of this study was 10 county decision makers in North Carolina. The counties selected were predominately rural with two being considered an urban county. North Carolina is a county manager state, with the county manager recommending public policy decisions for approval by the county commissioners. For a phenomenology based study, the sample size to avoid saturation is between five-25 participants (Mason, 2010).

The participant size for this study fell within that range.

Boundaries of the Study

The study population was 10 county managers in North Carolina. Several of the initial 10 county managers declined to participate. They were replaced with the county managers of from five same county demographics (i.e., a rural county). Each county

manager was identified numerically (i.e., 1-10) to provide anonymity and prevent attribution to a respondent. This study was not extended to other states.

Potential Transferability

The transferability of this study was the potential for applicability to other counties and states. By repeating this study in several counties and eventually states it could be determined if one methodology is being used more than another. Additionally a determination could be made for the need of developing and implementing a decision making methodology that seeks to minimize second and third order effects.

Limitations

Limitations of the study

The research study had the following limitations:

1. This study was limited to analysis of the decision making methods in use by several county decision makers in North Carolina.
2. Other local governments (i.e., cities, towns, incorporations) are not included in this study.
3. The respondent county managers do not need a working knowledge of all public policy decision making methods. As an example, a county manager using cost benefit analysis as a decision making methodology would not be expected to know how to use a Group Decision Support System methodology. The intent of the study was to determine if a decision making methodology is used and to catalog the method or methods used.

Thus, the key is the method or methods (if any) used by the respondent, not their knowledge of available public policy decision making methods.

4. The frequency of public policy decision making was not included in this study. The focus was on the use of a public policy decision making methodology, not its frequency of use. The rationale for this is that the study was on whether or not the respondents use a decision making methodology, not the frequency of their decision making (e.g. once or twice a week).

Biases That Could Influence the Study

Biases that could influence this study were demographics such as age and gender. Thus, neither age, nor gender was considered as to the selection of the interviewees, since the investigation is on the use of a methodology, not who uses the methodology. Including age and gender in the study would open questions beyond the scope of this study and were not researched in this study. Another bias could be the selection of rural counties versus urban counties. Since 85% of North Carolinas counties are rural, 80% of the counties being investigated are rural. The investigation nearly replicated the rural to urban mix of the state (North Carolina) while avoiding saturation. The final study bias is the nature of the study itself with a small sample. For a phenomenology based study, the sample size to avoid saturation is between five-25 participants (Mason, 2010).

Measures to Address Limitations

The same questions were asked each interviewee. The interview questions were designed to collect information within the above limitations (see Chapter 3).

Significance

Contributions of the Study

This study has contributed to the body of knowledge in public policy action decision making through the identification of methods being used in several North Carolina counties. I showed that county decision makers are using a method of public policy action decision making that includes the consideration of effects in the decision making process.

The information gathered could be used to refine public policy administration instruction at both the undergraduate and graduate level. As an example, as the literature research has shown that multiple decision making methods are being used by the county managers, a potential follow on activity is comparing the methods identified in this study against the methods being instructed in North Carolina's Colleges and Universities offering programs in public policy administration. From this comparison a determination could be made if there is a need to revise curriculums.

Implications for Positive Social Change

This study has a positive social change implication by identifying decision making methods being used by public policy decision makers in several counties in North Carolina. The research also determined that decision makers take in account the effects of

their decisions. These effects go beyond the intended effect (first order effect) of the decision to include second and third order effects.

There are methods used to assist decision makers in making their public policy decisions; however these methods, by design, only look at the intended effect of the decision. To fully serve those whose lives and livelihood are affected by their decisions it was necessary to determine if public policy decision makers do consider effects beyond the policy's intent. This research was the first step in identifying that there is a gap in the literature—that the method used by public policy decision makers has not been captured in literature.

This study determined what methods are being used and if second and third order effects are considered. The next step is to update the literature on public policy decision making.

Summary

The purposes of this qualitative study were to determine what methods were being used as North Carolina's county managers make public policy decisions and to determine if they considered second and third order effects of the public policy actions.

A review of the current literature on the formulation of public policy actions showed that public policy practitioners fail to look at the effects of their actions. A recent trend is that public policy practitioners even fail to consider what primary effects will result from their actions. Public policy actions are being made by public policy

practitioners without consideration of the effects of their public policy action. The following chapter shows the literature used to identify the problem.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purposes of this qualitative study were twofold. The first purpose was to determine what methods are being used by North Carolina's county managers as they make public policy decisions. The second purpose was to determine if North Carolina's county managers are using an effects based methodology that allows for an analysis of potential second and third order effects of the public policy prior to the policy's enactment.

This literature review was approached using the Lan and Anders (2000) tier-two Historical/Perceptual Approach for analyzing public policy decision making. As such the review includes material older than 5 years and more recent in publication date. The reason for this is to develop the historical base of public policy decision making and then tie in the more recent literature. The recent literature, when coupled with the older material shows that there are decision making methods being used but not one generally used one, nor is there one which considers effects of the policy in the decision making process.

The major sections of this chapter include the literature search strategy, theoretical foundations, historical public policy decision making, and current public policy decision making.

Literature Search Strategy

In this review, articles were found to cover a broad period of time going back beyond the expected 5 years. Older articles provide a basis of understanding of what decision making methods have been used in public policy decision making. The review and analysis of these older articles provide a historical understanding of what public policy planning methods have been used and why they are still being used. Newer articles showed older methods, current methods, and emerging trends. Combined, the articles provided an understanding of past, present, and emerging methods in public policy decision making. Many of the articles related to the historical public policy decision making are older than 5 years; several of the articles on emerging trends are older than 5 years. This is necessary due to a dearth of articles written within the past 5 years.

For this literature review, a search for relevant literature was conducted. This search included books, journal articles (peer and nonpeer reviewed), monographs, dissertations, conference presentations, and websites. Online databases, via Walden's University Library, were used to find the material. The search terms used in conducting the literature review included: *effects + based*, *effects + operations*, *effects + based+ operations*, *public + policy*, *public + policy + planning*, *public + policy + decision*,

public + policy + decision making, public + administration, public + administration + decision and public + administration + decision making.

Theoretical Foundation

In the 1960s, public policy decisions were made after deliberation by agencies or organizations policy analysis divisions (Howard, 2005). These agencies analyzed the issue and developed a recommendation for the organization's leadership. However, the analysis often failed to look at how the decision was to be implemented leading to second and third order effects (Howard, 2005). Other decision makers looked to how similar public policy bodies made their decisions; a process called diffusion and then adapted that policy to their body. The circumstances that allowed the program policy to work in one area may not have been the same in the other area and thus unintended effects from the policy adaption may occur (Nicholson-Crotty, 2009).

Another example is allowing the public to participate in the public policy decision making. Hastak, et al. (2001) made the case for including citizens in decision making through the use of survey, with Santos and Chess (2003) making a case for involving stakeholders, those with an interest in the policy action into the decision making process, in doing so the stakeholders share in the decision. They cautioned that merely allowing interested parties into the room does not increase the feeling of participation (Santos & Chess, 2003). Although the need for decision making is addressed and various methods for decision making for determining if a public policy action should be enacted, the literature does not state that either a method must be used, or if one method is more

advantageous than another. Public Policy decision makers developing public policy actions should take the interests of those that will be affected by the action as the prime consideration in determining what actions to take. In order to fully understand the emerging trends in public policy decision making, it is necessary to examine historical public policy decision making.

Historical Public Policy Decision Making

Lindblom (1958) stated that public policy decisions “are attempts to correct mistakes of previous policies” (p. 306). Lindblom described a policy analysis decision making system based on incrementalism, wherein one policy follows another. In this system changes are evaluated against the present situation, then as policies are implemented the expected results from each implementation is anticipated and compared to the desired result (pp 300-306). Essentially this method, “compares results of . . . policies . . . with the policy of no change at all” (Lindblom, 1958, p. 302). Lindblom was describing effects base planning—the evaluation of the effectiveness and effects of one of policy to determine if the policies desired results are being obtained.

Lindblom (1959) described two approaches to public policy decision making, one in which every possible outcome was analyzed before the policy was adopted and one in which policy goals are limited with its actions undertaken serving to move towards accomplishing the goal and then another goal. Lindblom asserted that the first method cannot be used except for simple problems since all branches and sequels to a problem cannot be considered. While ideally the second method should be used (incrementalism)

Lindblom observes that it is the first method taught and used, a method that in its analysis “takes into account all “relevant factor[s]” (Lindblom 1959, p. 81).

Lindblom (1979) describes three types of policy analysis all of which involve to one degree, or another incrementalism. In the first type decision makers conduct an analysis that “is limited to consideration of alternative policies all of which are only incrementally different from the status quo” (p. 517). The second type has “mutually supporting set of simplifying and focusing stratagems” (p. 517). The final type of analysis is “limited to any calculated to thoughtfully chose set of stratagems to simplify complex policy problems” (p. 518). This final analytic type Lindblom calls strategic analysis.

Lindblom continues to make a case for strategic analysis and describes three types of strategic analysis. The first of these, strategic analysis, is seen by Lindblom as a “complex problem” (Lindblom 1979, p. 518). He offers that the analysis of a decision should be considered as a continuum where possible decisions are displayed. Lindblom offers that in this method of analysis some are more likely to engage in “a variety of simplifying stratagems like skillfully sequenced trial and error” (p. 518). In this guided method the decision maker looks for possibilities of what can be accomplished and how they can be done.

Lindblom’s (1979) second method is disjointed incrementalism. This method, according to Lindblom, is essentially a subset of strategic analysis (p. 518). In this method the decision maker analyzes supporting stratagems to arrive at the decision. The

final decision method Lindblom (1979) describes is simple incremental analysis. This method of analysis is “no more than small or incremental departures from the status quo” (p. 519).

Taken together Lindblom’s ideas on incrementalism describe a decision making method in which radical changes are not undertaken. Instead small changes are incrementally made to effect a change in the status quo. These changes are not necessarily undertaken in one public policy action, but in multiple ones, thus the incrementalism. Lindblom concludes with the following; his desire was to “stimulate attempts. . . to articulate other [decision making] strategies. . . . On the whole these hopes have been disappointed” (p. 525).

Continuing this theme, Lindblom (1990) describes how decision makers can apply a scientific method of inquiry to solving problems. Lindblom cautions that social scientists are not at all times the best to pursue the inquiry and thus citizens must either assist the social scientist, or do the analysis. While making policy decisions Lindblom describes a process in which the government officials form choices. In order to do this the officials must determine the desires of the people who will be effected by the decision and the officials must determine the reasons for their own choices. In doing so, ideally, decisions that can be injuries to those who are effected by the decision are avoided.

To accomplish the above, Lindblom (1990) describes a path of mutual adjustment in which those who make the decision attempt to reach a common ground by coming together to reach a beneficial solution. In doing so, decision makers develop solutions to

problems that are not injurious. The decision makers must avoid the trap of falling victim to the policy analysts' review of the situation and determining the outcome for the decision maker.

Lindblom (1990) raises a caution that while analysts can provide an analysis of the situation it is not their role to solve the problem for the decision maker. The decision maker, by being closer to their constituents knows their needs, wants, and desires, thusly is better positioned to make the decision.

Walker (2000) dovetails with Lindblom as he details the emergence of policy analysis, a technique that, according to Walker, has been used since the early 1950s to make public policy decisions. Borrowing from operations research, what began as simple analysis of a simple objective, evolved into an analysis of more complex problems. Although not able to solve a problem, public policy analysis provides the methodology to do so. Using the traditional scientific method, the public policy practitioner collects information, analyzes that information, then disseminates that information to the stakeholders for the policy being discussed.

Public policy analysis is used for the analysis of complex issues; complex issue being a systemic issue, or an issue that deals with more than one variable and more than one consequence (Walker, 2000). The normal model for public policy analysis consists of a system model that establishes the boundaries structure of the system. The external actors impact the system, external forces, and policy change.

External forces are the forces beyond the control of the stakeholders, with policy change being what the stakeholders are trying to cause. The external forces considered include but are not limited to fiscal reality; technology; time; and the perceived, or real grievances of the people; and the will of the people including all stakeholders. Policy is those actions that the stakeholders (here those engaged in public policy decision making) desire to emplace upon the system to fix an issue (Walker, 2000).

Walker (2000) described an eight step model for policy analysis. The steps in the model are:

1. Identify the problem
2. Identify the objectives of the new policy
3. Decide on criteria (measures of performance and cost) with which to evaluate alternative policies
4. Select the alternative policies to be evaluated
5. Analyze each alternative
6. Compare the alternatives in terms of projected costs and effects
7. Implement the chosen alternative
8. Monitor and evaluate the results

In Step 1, Identify the problem, the issue to be addressed in the analysis is defined and stakeholders are identified. The second step determines the objectives of the new policy. Step 3 determines what measures will be used when evaluating the yet to be developed policy alternatives. In Step 4, the policies to be analyzed are selected. All

feasible policies should be analyzed during this step. To establish a baseline, the current policy, if there is one, also needs to be identified in this step. Step 5 is the analysis of each policy alternative. The consequences of each proposed policy, including the current one, need to be determined. The term consequence does not have a totally negative meaning. Both beneficial and harmful consequences must be determined, to include cost. In this step the pros and cons of an action are identified, not compared to each other. In Step 6, the pros and cons of each policy are compared to each other to determine the best policy to implement or rectify the issue identified in Step 1. Should no alternative resolve the issue, then the practitioners must return to Step 4 and repeat Steps 4-6 until a solution is determined. Once the policy has been identified, Step 7 implements the policy. This includes training for those who will actually carry out the policy (e.g. agency workers), to informing constituents of the new policy. The final step, Step 8, monitors and evaluates the adopted policy to ensure that it truly does rectify the problem identified in Step 1. If the new policy fails to fully address the issue identified in step 1, then the stakeholders must return to Step 4 and repeat the steps to modify the solution until it resolves the issue (Walker, 2000). This method was and still continues to be used to resolve public policy issues.

In the 1960s, public policy decisions were made after deliberation by agencies, or organizations' policy analysis divisions. (Howard, 2005) These divisions, according to Howard, were the sole decision making bodies for the organization. They were charged to make a firm analysis of the issue and to develop a recommendation for the

organization's leadership. Analysis methods were used to assist in the development of the recommendation. However, the fault with these bodies was that while they used a decision making methodology, they often failed to look at how the decision was to be implemented (Howard, 2005).

Howard (2005) states that decision makers were divorced from the what and how of the decision and once they made a recommendation, as to what policy action was to be made, their work was finished. It fell to the appropriate section in the organization to implement the action. The implementation section in the organization, more than likely had provided no input to the decision making body, thus policy was developed and implemented by two distinct groups, without close coordination.

Another avenue open to those responsible for making decisions was to look at what other policy making bodies were doing, a process called diffusion. Not all decisions made diffuse at the same rate, some policies are rapidly diffused, being adopted by diverse bodies in a short period of time and then the adoption ends (Nicholson-Crotty, 2009). An example of rapid diffusion could be the adoption of state lotteries as a method of obtaining funds for a state's education system. Since the policy has already been implemented in another locality, decision makers can and do readily adopt and adapt the policy to meet their needs; whether the needs are the implementation of the policy, or being able to achieve a quick political advantage. The quick political advantage works for a politician, since they are able to say that through their efforts a policy has been enacted that will bring results to the people. Do these politicians in their quest for quick gains

consider the long-term effects of the newly implemented policy (Nicholson-Crotty, 2009)?

There is a school of thought, in which members of state legislatures, choose to use diffusion as a policy-making method solely to achieve re-election. Politicians and even the public policy practitioners that support the politicians benefit from diffusion since the policy appears to be working in another locale, thus the success of the policy seems probable. Future costs or policy failure is not a factor, since the politicians are relying on the short-term election gains and not the effects of the policy in terms of cost and benefit (Nicholson-Crotty, 2009).

Over time, those affected by the decisions began to roil against the decisions being made by politicians and the nameless, faceless individuals who were not held accountable for the effects of their decision making. By the time the true cost of a decision becomes apparent, a law can be passed, the politician who championed the policy has long since gone, or the policy is found to have unintended consequences (e.g., cash for clunkers—the law resulted in less cars for the used car market and increased used car prices, a traditional source of vehicles for lower income people).

Citizens started to demand input to the policies that affected them and policy makers began to look towards methods to solicit information from the public as the policy makers made their decisions. Even with an understanding of how to influence public policy decision, practitioners, as a result of demands from the public to be heard in decision making have begun to look at methods to secure the public's input into the

decision making process. One method of doing so is the use of consumer surveys Hastak et al. (2001).

Hastak et al. (2001) described how surveys can be integrated into the policy making process. By including citizens' input into the decision making process at key points in the process, the policy can be shaped to ensure that the needs of the public have the most benefit with the best consequences. Their process begins with identifying the problem; building a policy mandate; exploring policy options; executing the policy; and a dual final step of evaluating the policy and enforcing the policy (Hastak et al., 2001).

By injecting public opinion into the exploration of policy options, decision makers determine which policies will be more readily accepted by the public. The decision makers become exposed to perceived consequences (intended and unintended) and can achieve public buy-in to the possible options to solving the problem. By soliciting public input in the evaluation step, the decision makers can determine if the policy is achieving the desired results, as determined by the public. Even though the decision makers may see a policy decision as being successful, it may not be seen as such by the public. Therefore, the policy will have little benefit and many consequences, mostly negative (Hastak, et al., 2001). Policy makers need to understand what values the people they serve consider important and more importantly how to imbibe these values into decision making; Keeny (2006) and Matherson (2009) offered insights on this area.

Recognizing that the problems facing today's decision makers are indeed complex, Keeny (2006) asserted that in taking action to solve a problem, there may be

detrimental effects that are best avoided. The best place to avoid detrimental effects is in the decision making. Keeny asked how to solve the problem. Keeny related that the only way to solve the problem is through structured decision making. In essence Keeny stated that policy makers, when they make decisions need to employ a methodology that minimizes the possibility of detrimental effects.

Defining objectives in public policy decision making requires a clear understanding of the values needed to identify the objective. Keeny (2006) lists five types of information needed to identify values. These are:

1. A list of the general values appropriate to consider
2. A translation of each of those general values into specific objectives to be achieved
3. A structure of the objectives showing their relationships to each other
4. The definition of attributes to define and measure the degree of achievement for each objective and serve as a basis for describing consequences
5. A quantification of the relative desirability of all possible consequences (Keeny, 2006).

Taken together these values provide the basis for determining public values that should be considered by decision makers as they make the decision that provided the most benefits with the best consequences.

In order to determine the values public policy makers needed and need to understand how an organization functions. A public policy practitioner can look at a corporate organization to determine a methodology for making decisions. Matheson (2009) builds on Mintzberg (1983), to develop a method for making public policy decisions, by understanding a corporation's organization. Mintzberg based his studies on how a corporation is organized. By dividing tasks across an organization, a degree of efficiency is achieved. Mintzberg recognized this and identified six coordinating mechanisms within the organization. Matheson builds on Mintzberg's coordinating mechanisms to identify eight different policy making modes. Matheson's Policy Making Modes are Expert, Ideological, Political, Collaborative, Procedural, Planning, Autocratic, and Visionary.

Matheson's modes provide a theory for understanding how public policy decisions are made. By looking at one or more of the modes, one can determine which avenues to use to influence the decision making process. Santos and Chess (2003) relate the increase in public participation in public policy decision making.

By involving stakeholders, those with an interest in the policy action into the decision making process, the stakeholders feel an increase in fairness in the ultimate decision. However, to ensure that feeling of fairness, the stakeholders, especially those ultimately affected by the policy, need to be included in the discussion of the issue, the determination of the policy.

Merely allowing them into the room does not increase the feeling of participation; the participation must be active (e.g. involvement in the process). The involvement does not have to be a free-for-all but can be structured (conducting the meeting according to Robert's Rules of Order for Meetings as an example) and an agenda should be set for each meeting. What is critical is that the public's voice be heard and that the public feels that their voice be heard (Santos & Chess, 2003, pp 269 - 277).

Barrett (2004) examined the resurgence of implementation studies to assess the effectiveness of public policy actions. Drawing on the studies of Hood (1976); Dunsire (1978); Gunn (1978); Hanf and Scharpf (1978); Sabatier and Mazmanian (1979); and Pressman and Wildavsky (1984); Barrett identified factors that collectively contribute to a policy's implementation failure. These factors are:

1. Lack of clear policy objectives; leaving room for differential interpretation and discretion in action;
2. Multiplicity of actors and agencies involved in implementation, problems of communication, and co-ordination between the 'links in the chain';
3. Inter- and intra-organizational value, interest differences between actors and agencies, problems of differing perspectives, priorities affecting policy interpretations, and motivation for implementation;
4. Relative autonomies among implementing agencies; limits of administrative control (Barrett, 2004).

To prevent policy implementation failures, Barret (2004) suggested that implementation be considered as part of the policy (or action) itself and not an additional step after the fact. In this regards, public policy action development is kin toward the Instructional System Development Process commonly referred to as ADDIE. As the need for a process is analyzed, it is designed, then developed, implemented, and finally evaluated. In ADDIE, the implementation step is part of the process that Barrett (2004) stated is overlooked in public policy action development.

Considering the implementation of a public policy action, as part of its development process, Barrett (2004) champions that a policy may more likely to achieve its designed goals, rather than be a failure. As an example, if a city were to take a public policy action of developing a new playground for grade school aged children, part of the implementation process should be a consideration of the age demographics of the neighborhood in which the playground is to be established. Determining the implementation of a public policy action, when it is in the developmental process, does increase the odds that the policy action will be effective. Stakeholders can voice their concerns on the implementation before the policy is placed in effect. Thus, a need for public participation arises.

Irvin and Stansbury (2004) support the importance of public participation in the public policy action decision process. The benefits of citizen involvement outweigh the disadvantages of not having citizen participation.

Van Knippenberg and Daamen (1996) champion the use of surveys in formulating public policy actions allowing citizen stakeholders an opportunity to present their views on an issue being developed. The use of surveys allowing the input of citizen stakeholders, are limited to the questions asked in the survey. The skewing of the survey, whether intentional or not, limits its usefulness in formulating public policy. Additionally the respondent pool may be low – those who have more than a passing interest in the issue – and not fully represent the viewpoints of the majority of those who will be impacted by the policy or action. However, the use of surveys is a method that does allow decision makers a method of collecting citizen stakeholder information. Through public participation the willingness of the citizenry to pay for a policy may be determined.

Silva (2004) introduces the concept of contingent valuation (CV). Contingent valuation is the measure of a person's "willingness to pay for goods" (p. 3); goods being defined as items "not traded in a traditional market setting" (p. 3), e.g., public policy. Based on the cost benefit analysis (CBA) CV, through interviews and surveys seeks to determine how much individuals are willing to pay to support a policy.

Silva (2004) determines that the value of CV is that it allows public policy practitioners to determine a value for items as part of a cost analysis on public policy discussions. CV dovetails with cost benefit analysis, as CV allows public policy practitioners to determine what is the price (WTP) individuals are willing to pay for a policy. Thus the public policy decision makers are provided with a method to determine

preferences based on what people are willing to pay for a solution, or what is the acceptable value people will pay, realizing that the value may not fully resolve an issue.

Santos and Chess (2003) are reinforced by Boxelaar, Paine, and Beilin (2006), who recognized the growth of public policy practitioners seeking out to the public for assistance in developing a public policy. By openly including the public as stakeholders in the development of the policy, a buy-in of the policy is developed when the policy is still being discussed and developed.

Hersh (1999) offers Decision Support Systems (DSS) as a method for reaching public policy decisions. Anticipated as a computer-based system, a DSS would assist policy makers in reaching their decisions thru use of Multi-Criteria Decision Methods programmed into a computer. By breaking a public policy action into mathematical equations a decision will be arrived at by the computer that could be adapted. A problem with this method is that who decides what variables are placed into the equation. A differing interpretation on the variable could skew the result. Though the computer would offer a solution, is a computer-based solution the best method to use when making decision that impact peoples' lives? Hersh's work is reflected in the works of Van Groenendaal (2003); and Jain et al (2006).

Van Groenendaal (2003), confirms, that in group decision support system (GDSS) methodology, the choice versus the procedure is the leading factor. The power of the information technology of the GDSS overwhelms how to use the technology to arrive at a decision. The use of GDSS in public policy action development requires a timeframe

beyond that of immediate decisions. Using GDSS for public policy planning requires that the issue at hand be fully framed in a manner that allows for the GDSS to assist in the decision making process. By adapting Mintzberg's ideas for strategic planning phases to GDSS, three distinct phases become apparent in using GDSS in public policy action decision making.

Jain et al. (2006) define group-decision support system (GDSS) "as an interactive, computer-based system that facilitates the solution of unstructured problems by a set of decision makers working together as a group" (p. 298). The use of GDSS has gained acceptance as a method of arriving at decisions. An example of a GDSS is ESRI's® ARCGIS® Geographic Informational System software. It has the inherent ability to take geographic information entered into data tables by the user (or purchased from a vendor) with demographics of an area. These demographics can be limited or as large as the user desires.

As an example, a city desires to place a new after school activity center for elementary school students (grades 1-5). By entering into a spreadsheet census block information that shows ages, or entering data provided by the schools system on the number of students per grade and the locations of the schools, a central location can be determined by the software showing a location for the center in the geo-center of the schools. Thus by centrally locating the center, the city may increase the use of the center. A similar use of this software would be to show the central location for a multi-school Parent Teacher Organization meeting.

Although the above is a simple example of a GDSS, more complex decisions can be reached by increasing the complexity of the mathematical model that supports the decision making process.

This brief discussion has outlined, in general terms, methods that have been used in the past to form the decision public policy makers undertake. Which of these historical methods are still being used, what emerging methods are gaining acceptance and is there any one method, that research identifies as being used more than another?

Current Public Policy Decision Making

The methods that have been used in the past are still being used in the present. Nilsson et al. (2008) determined that no established public policy assessment tool exists and thus the conundrum of using older research, it is still relevant to today, since newer research is lacking.

Public policy problems and the actions to resolve them are wicked. Rittel and Webber, (1973), as cited in Nilsson et al. (2008) coined the term *wicked* to describe complex public policy problems) since the problem may not lend itself to being fully defined, nor may the root cause of the problem lend itself to being identified and the consequences may not be readily identifiable. Though, a wicked problem exists, the methods of resolving it have also become wicked. Even though the tools are available and presumed to be used, Nilsson et al. (2008) postulate that there is little empirical evidence that they are indeed used.

In determining the extent to which these tools are indeed used, Nilsson et al. (2008) combine public policy assessment tools into one of three groups. Simple tools are items such as checklists used to assist the assessors in their assessments. More complex are formal tools such as cost benefit analysis (CBA) and multi-criteria analysis. The most complex level of tools, advanced, are the computer based modeling, that try to capture all the variables surrounding the issue to be resolved by the public policy being analyzed. The identification of a tool as simple, formal, or advanced by Nilsson et al. does not imply that the advanced are better tools but simply different. All the tools identified have their use.

By studying 37 case studies, Nilsson et al. (2008) determined that as the public policy problems facing practitioners of public policy are becoming more complex, the use of assessment tools depends not on the complexity of the issue but on the comfort level of the organization performing the assessment. An organization used to using simple tools will default to using simple tools, since that is their level of comfort, while an organization faced with a similar complex problem may use advanced assessment tools, since that is what the organization uses. Tied to an organization's familiarity of an assessment tool, is the predisposition of an agency to use an assessment tool that supports the preconceived agenda of the organization. The use of simple assessment tools was determined to be used to assist public policy practitioners in reaching a solution, with the use of advanced tools being determined to have a less pure motive behind it. Advanced

assessment tools were used to limit participation in decisions making or to buttress an agenda.

Nilsson et al. (2008) propose that as wicked problems persists; the education of public policy practitioners to adopt advanced assessment tools needs to occur. By doing so, the use of these advanced tools and the information gained in the analysis, can be used to confirm assessment results achieved by the use of formal and simple assessments (p, 353).

Edwards (2005) offers a telling statement about the state of public policy decision making. Far too often, the discussion issue is not the relevant immediate need issue. The research issue is often driven by ideology, playing to the base as it were. An example the county commissioners looking for a new bus terminal location, while ignoring the need for additional funding for schools.

Edwards (2005) presents another public policy decision making model. This model consists of six steps taken in a linear fashion that eventually becomes a cyclical progression. Edwards states that by using a model in decision making it is possible to achieve the desired results from the implementation of the policy. Edwards' model is shown in Figure 1.

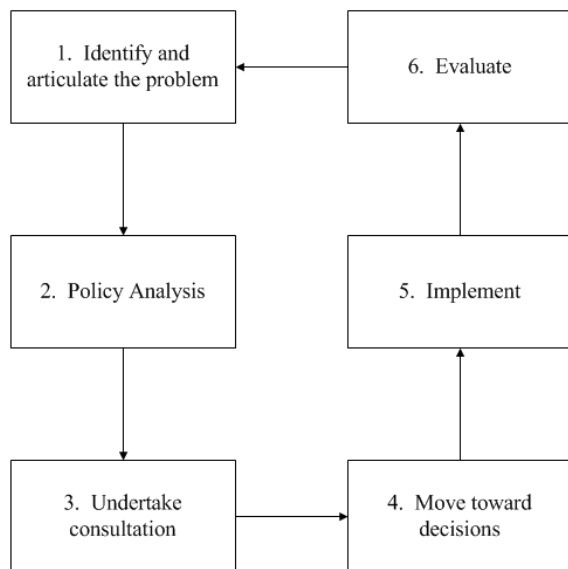


Figure 1. Edwards' Model.

Edwards (2005) expresses that while public policy practitioners may use a model to assist in deciding public policy, they must also engage in frequent communications. The model is just a tool that guides the decision makers in the process. The actual decision making is in the result of the free and open communications during which the steps in the model frame the discussion to reach a policy decision.

Decision Analysis, as used to assist public policy practitioners in including outsiders in the decision making process, is described by Gregory (2005). In this method public interaction is added to the decision making model by the public policy practitioner. The methods of public interaction include such items as surveys, interviews, advisory boards, and citizen panels. The incorporation of non-traditional decision makers in the process affords an opportunity for those who will ultimately be affected by the policy to have a voice in determining the policy.

Crucial to using non-traditional decision makers, is the need for complete information related to the issue being discussed being made available for all who are, or will be involved in the decision making process. This is more than just simply making information available, since the non-traditional decision makers may not be as informed as they should be. Thus, public policy practitioners who employ this method have to not only provide information but need to include all information relevant to the issue both pro and con. The public policy practitioners must also avoid relating information that will create either a bias towards one side or the other of the issue but also must prevent from appearing to present bias information (Gregory, 2005).

The second crucial element for including non-traditional decision makers is the need to be able to express the issue in terms that the non-traditional decision makers can understand. Public policy practitioners are intimately familiar with the language used to developing public policy and its nuances, a subtlety that can and does escape the non-traditional decision makers. For the full impact of the non-traditional decision makers the issue being discussed must be disseminated in terms that are simple and concise and can be decided in pieces as part of the whole (Gregory, 2005). The need for successful integration of non-traditional decision makers into the public policy decision process requires that the issue being discussed is devolved into parts which can be considered individually. An analysis of each part of a solution to an issue should allow for analysis of consequences of the policy, or action that is being discussed.

Not only does this method add non-traditional decision makers into the decision making process, it also requires that public policy practitioners assume non-traditional roles. Public policy practitioners must assume the role of discussion group facilitator and decision maker. As a facilitator, public policy practitioners must ensure that all members of the group have access to the relevant information. Public policy practitioners must ensure that all members of the group involved in the discussion have the opportunity to take part in the discussion and that the role of the non-traditional decision makers is not diminished since they are not true public policy practitioners (Gregory, 2005).

Gastil (2008) postulates that public deliberation, though ill-defined, has a place in the development of public policy and in ensuring that desired effects are achieved and in doing so builds on the research of Santos and Chess (2003) and Boxelaar et al. (2006). Gastil defines the term to set the basis for the examination of public deliberation. Public deliberation is “when people deliberate, they carefully examine a problem and arrive at a well-reasoned (sic) solution after a period of inclusive, respectful consideration of diverse points of view” (p. 3).

Thus, public deliberation is dialogue amongst stakeholders to arrive at a common solution that will effect positive change. All participants receive an “adequate opportunity to speak” (Gastil, 2008, p. 4) during the deliberation process. An adequate opportunity does not equate to equal time, rather that all have “equal and adequate opportunity” (Gastil, 2008, p. 4) to participate. This is not further defined and left to further users to determine.

Though the speakers are allowed to speak in the deliberative process, it is the speaker's duty to ensure that they are heard. Heard does not literally mean heard but that the idea that is being conveyed in the discussion is spoken in terms that all participants can understand, while avoiding patronizing speech. However, in a reverse of communication theory, it is the responsibility of the listener/receiver to fully comprehend what they hear through careful consideration. Thus, the listener must not just be a passive receiver but an active one. The communication exchange encourages a mutual understanding, a free exchange of ideas and arrival at a mutually satisfying solution (Gastil, 2008).

Different types of public deliberation have different implications. For example in determining of public policy actions (through legislation) in the federal or state legislatures debates symbolic issues while ignoring substantial issues has the legislature fully considered the effects, short and long term of its action, or has it figuratively buried their heads in the sand to avoid a contentious debate for the sake of harmony. Public deliberation amongst the members of a legislature require them to place aside party differences and act together for a greater good beyond just the people who send the legislator to the legislature. Failing to do so ensure that the intended effects of legislation may not be what was intended and in some respects may be legislation that does not fully consider effects on constituents, since the legislation is enacted just because the party in power has the votes to do so. Failure to effect public deliberation usually has negative effects (Gastil, 2008).

Yang and Lan (2010) show that through the internet citizens who will be affected by a public policy action can express their opinions on the action while it is still in the discussion stage. The internet offers an avenue for more productive interaction between citizenry and policy makers that previously was conducted in open forums such as town meetings. During town meetings, with a set time limit, not all who desired to participate could but through the internet, those who desire to participate in an issue can.

Use of surveys as part of the discussion process provides a method of data collection to judge the public's reaction to the policy or action. This collation of information can be used to develop the action or policy into one that meets the needs of the majority of those who will be affected by it (433-434).

The use of the internet, though presupposes that all interested persons will use the internet for the discussions on the issue. Those without internet access or less net savvy persons may opt out of internet usage and rely on more traditional methods of having their voices heard (e.g. town hall meetings). Therefore, while the internet can bring involvement of citizens to an issue it should not be the only method open for citizen participation in public policy decision making.

The research of Hersh (1999), Groenendaal (2003) and Jain et al. (2006) are reinforced by Jensen (2007). Jensen (2007) identified the influence tactics that are most used by public policy practitioners and against them. The influence tactics Jensen studied are shown in Table 1. Table 2, shows the frequency of use of the several influence tactics

used by public policy practitioners and by others against them listed from most used to least used.

Jensen (2007) determined that influence tactics are used in public policy decision making, some with more frequency than the others. To Jensen the results are a tool for public policy practitioners to use influence tactics to sway the opinions of other person engage in the policy decision making process. The value of Jensen's research is that public policy practitioners are made aware to the influence tactics that are available for their use and the tactics that are used against them. Thus, practitioners can develop a defense mechanism to avoid falling for one or another of the tactics.

Table 1

Influence Tactics

Tactic	Mechanisms Used In The Tactic
Assertiveness (Pressure Tactics)	Expressed his or her anger verbally Demanded that I do what he or she wanted
Coalition Tactics	Pointed out that many nonparticipants back up his or her idea Obtained the support of other participants to back up his or her idea
Consultation	Told me what he or she was trying to accomplish and asked if I knew of a good way to do it Actively sought my input with regard to a decision
Exchange Tactics	Reminded me of past favors that he or she did for me Offered me an exchange (quid pro quo) Offered to make a personal sacrifice if I would do what he or she wanted
Ingratiating Tactics	Made me feel important (e.g., “only you have the brains, talent to do this”) Praised me Acted very humbly to me while making his or her request
Inspirational Appeals	Used charisma to arouse my interest and support for his or her ideas and proposals Described his or her proposal or change with enthusiasm and conviction that it is important and worthwhile
Rational Persuasion	Explained the reasons for his or her request Demonstrated his or her competence to me Used logic to convince me Presented me with information in support of his or her point of view

Source: Jensen (2007)

Table 2

Influence Tactics Ranked by Frequency Of Use (most to least)

By Public Policy Practitioners (Self)	Against Public Policy Practitioners (Others)
Inspirational Appeals	Rational Persuasion
Rational Persuasion	Inspirational Appeals
Consultation	Consultation
Ingratiation	Coalition Formation
Coalition Formation	Ingratiation
Exchange Tactics	Assertiveness (Pressure Tactics)
Assertiveness (Pressure Tactics)	Exchange Tactics

Source: Jensen (2007)

Paez et al. (2006) point out a flaw in traditional CBA, the lack of stakeholder involvement. Traditional CBA does not include a geo-spatial component. While public policy practitioners may have a clear view of what areas could be affected by adoption of a public policy action, which view does not readily transpose to the public. In order to improve CBA, Paez et al. (2006) propose adoption of a computer decision support system.

Cost benefit analysis, according to Paez et al. (2006), is best used where it is possible to estimate the economic, environmental, and social cost of a public policy decision. Cost benefit analysis begins with the identification of baseline e.g. no change to the current situation. Next alternative solutions are identified, followed by what effect occurs over time for the alternative solutions versus the baseline solution. The identification of the effects over time for a solution, when compared to the baseline identifies the cost-benefits of the solution. Lastly the cost-benefits are assessed monetary worth. However, it is not possible, in all cases, to assess worth to a benefit. In this case

contingent valuation may need to be used, or another estimation method to determine the worth.

Public policy practitioners are encouraging and seeking input from the public as the practitioners undertake discussion on a policy. The assessing of a value in CBA is a subjective method, which may not be accurately assessed against all who may be affected by a policy. The effect may be greater in one area than another and thus, public stakeholders may not readily understand how they will be affected (Paez et al., 2006).

By identify a Geo-Informational System (GIS) based that shows the public the effects that CBA has assessed, Paez et al. (2006), determined that the public feels a greater sense of ownership in the decision made by the public policy practitioners.

Summary

The research shows that there is not a single methodology in use to asses in making public policy decisions. From Lindblom with his recommendation of incrementalism to the emerging trend of Group Decision Support Systems no clear methodology has emerged as the preferred decision making method for public policy decisions. Perhaps there is not a single methodology that is overall best. Nor do any of the methods currently being used take in consideration during the decision making process the effects of the public policy action, especially the second and third order effects. This research study has filled a gap in the knowledge of public policy action decision making by showing that there is no single methodology and that effects are not considered in public policy decision making. The following chapter describes the

research methodology used to determine what methods are being used by North Carolina's county managers to make public policy plans, programs, policies, and decisions (public policy actions) and to determine if they are using an effects based method.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Lindblom (1959) describes an approach to public policy decision making, in which policy goals are limited, with decisions or actions undertaken to move towards accomplishing a goal and then another goal. This method is incrementalism, a solution solving one problem and then another solution moving towards more results.

The literature review showed that a gap exists in public policy decision making. There is not a single methodology in universal use to determine the effects of a decision in making public policy decisions. Nor do any of the methods currently being used take into consideration, during the decision making process, the effects of the public policy action, especially the second and third order effects.

The purposes of this qualitative study were twofold. The first purpose was to determine what methods are being used by North Carolina's county managers as they make public policy decisions. The second purpose was to determine if North Carolina's county managers are using an effects based methodology that allows for an analysis of potential second and third order effects of the public policy prior to the policy's enactment.

This chapter is a description of the research design and rationale used to gather data that answered the research questions. This chapter includes the role of the researcher; participant selection logic; instrumentation; procedures for recruitment,

participation and data collection; data analysis plan; issues of trustworthiness; and ethical procedures.

Research Design, and Rationale

This study was a qualitative study to determine which, if any, methods are being used by North Carolina county decision makers in deciding public policy actions. The study also determined if North Carolina county decision makers are using an effects based methodology that allows for an analysis of potential second and third order effects of the public policy prior to the policy's enactment.

The research questions for this investigation were:

1. What methods are being used by public policy practitioners in county management decision making in North Carolina?
2. Do North Carolina county management decision makers consider second order and third order effects when making public policy action decisions?
3. What is the relationship, if any, between the number of years of tenure a North Carolina county decision maker has and the likelihood of their use of a formalized decision making methodology?

Through the use of interviews, the research questions were answered.

Without guidance as to a method to use, or when to use one, decision makers have used various methods and are looking at emerging methods to either replace or augment those methods currently in use. The use of decision making methodology needs to be akin to tools in a tool box. If decision makers are not knowledgeable of the various

methods (tools) available to them, will they use the method they are most comfortable (familiar) with regardless of the applicability of the methodology to the decision at hand?

When formulating the decision of the moment, do the decision makers look beyond the expected effects of the decision by consider second and third order effects—the unintended consequences? Do the decision makers identify measures of effectiveness and measures of performance to ascertain the effectiveness of the public policy decision in achieving its designed goal? These questions were not answered in the literature review. This investigation is the first step in answering them.

For this investigation the phenomenology research tradition was used, with the method being interviews with county decision makers. A phenomenological research method records the experiences of the participants as recorded by the researcher. Through interviews, a researcher captures those experiences. In doing so the researcher must avoid injecting their self into the research and remain both neutral and unbiased (Creswell, 1998).

The phenomenological research tradition was selected for this study since it allows for the experiences of others to be recorded and the selection of the phenomenology research tradition is allows for a for a small study pool, ideally five to 25 participants. Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) and Mason (2010) both identified the size of the phenomenology research pool as more than five participants.

The phenomenology research tradition allows for the recording of experiences of a manageable study sample. The use of interviews, inherent in this method, allows a

researcher to obtain an understanding of the why the interviewee acted the way they did (e.g., in making a decision). That understanding can take that decision beyond just the making of the decision to reveal the process behind it (e.g., the consideration of the effects of the decision on the citizenry and to what level of consideration). After the interviews, the results from them can be compiled into a report that answers the research questions and serves as a basis for further research.

Role of the Researcher

As an observer the investigator's role was to conduct the interview with each of the study's participants. Each participant was asked the same questions and the answers were recorded (nonaudio) as summarized notes by the investigator. There were no known personal and/or professional relationships between the investigator and the study participants. There were no known or anticipated power relationships since the investigator is not an employee of any county manager. I identified myself as a PhD student conducting research for my dissertation. The potential for biases were reduced by using the same questions with each participant and by the investigator staying on script and not relating the responses of other participants to another participant.

There were no known or expected ethical issues for the study investigator (interviewer). In conducting research the interviewer must place on ethnocentric blinders to remove any prejudices that may consciously or unconsciously exist (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Each respondent was provided the interview questions prior to the interview and each interviewee was asked the same questions.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The study population was 10 county managers in North Carolina. With eight of the counties being considered rural counties the ratio of rural to urban counties for this study nearly replicates the statewide ratio of rural to urban counties (85 rural:15 urban).

The criterion for the participants was that they be the county manager. North Carolina is a county manager managed state, with the county manager recommending public policy decisions for approval by the county commissioners. The main reason for the focus on North Carolina is that it is the state where I reside. By conducting the research on participants in the state I live in, I was able to mitigate any potential difficulty that may have arisen during the conducting of the research (this turned out to be a non-issue). The county managers were initially selected by the demographic of their county (i.e., rural or urban) and location (i.e., closeness to my home county to allow for ease of travel if needed).

Study participants were identified as the county manager through the county website or by either contacting their office in the case where the manager's name was not on the county's website. There were 10 participants for the study, one per county study. The counties selected were selected due to their location to my home county and that they are a mix of rural and urban counties that closely replicate the state's county mix of rural to urban counties. When a county manager declined to be interviewed another county was selected (no process being used) other than to make sure it was a rural county.

The procedures for identifying, contacting and recruiting participants were:

1. An introductory letter was sent to each manager describing to them the purpose of the research and asking for their assistance. This was sent 3 weeks before the interview timeframe (interview window). Included in this e-mail were the interview questions and consent form.
2. A follow up e-mail was sent to the managers, essentially restating the letter and asking for a response if they were willing to be interviewed.
3. For those managers unwilling to be interviewed, another county manager was selected and sent an e-mail requesting their assistance in the research. The Steps in 2 and 3 were repeated till the number of respondents was achieved.
4. One week before the interview, an e-mail was sent, thanking, in advance, the managers for their support. Included in this e-mail were the interview questions and consent form.
5. The interviews were conducted telephonically based on the availability of the interviewee.
6. Upon approval of this research the managers will be sent a copy of the analyzed interview data, so they can see the results.

A phenomenology based study is geared towards discovering the experiences of the participants and thus, there is a point where the collection of data does not produce any new experiences or insights—the saturation point. For a phenomenology based study

the sample size to avoid saturation is between five-25 participants (Mason, 2010). The participant size (10) for this study falls within that range.

Instrumentation

For this study data collection was by an interview, with the participant's answers recorded by the interviewer. Each participant was asked the same interview questions. The interview questions were developed by the investigator. No historical or legal documents were used as a source of data. The interview questions were designed to answer the research questions and solicit examples from the participants of when they made public policy decisions.

The questions were tested on the researcher's co-workers before the actual interviews, to ensure the readability of the questions. The same set of interview questions were used for each participant. The interview questions were tested prior to the actual interviews with the investigator's coworkers to determine how the question was perceived by the participant and for the validity of the question.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation and Data Collection

Table 3 shows the details of the data collection.

Table 3

Details Of The Data Collection

From where data will be collected?	Data will be collected from the participants in each of their offices.
Who will collect the data?	Data will be collected by the study investigator.
Frequency of data collection events.	One data collection event, per county with follow ups visits as needed.
Duration of data collection events.	Interviews are anticipated to last 60-90 minutes.
How data will be recorded?	Data will be manually recorded on paper in response to participant's answers.
Follow-up plan if recruitment results in too few participants.	If the recruitment plan results in too few participants, additional counties will be included ensuring the 4 rural to one urban county ratio.

Participants will be provided with the results of the study upon approval of the study. The reason for this is twofold, first it is a method of thanking them for their assistance in the study and secondly it provides the participants with the results of the study for their use as they desire. This dissemination of results will be made to the participants via email. The e-mail will be followed with a phone call to each participant ensuring that they received the study results and asking if they have any questions. There was no need to conduct follow up interviews. The plan was, if follow-up procedures were needed, arrangements would have been coordinated with the participants to obtain the follow up data.

Data Analysis Plan

Table 4 shows the data analysis plan for the collected data.

Table 4

Data Analysis Plan

Connection of data to a specific research question.	The developed questions will be linked to the research questions and to elicit open ended responses as to examples of decisions made.
Type of and procedure for coding.	None
Any software used for analysis.	None
Manner of treatment of discrepant cases.	None anticipated

Issues of Trustworthiness

The following section addresses the issues of trustworthiness for the investigation.

Credibility

The creditability of the data is the credibility of the research as viewed by the participants (Trochim, 2006). Thus to insure credibility questions were be posed several times by varying the questions wording to ensure the truthfulness of the data. All participants were asked the same questions, with follow up questions asked only to ensure that the questions were fully answered (e.g., if a respondent answers they have a college education without elaborating if they graduated, a follow up question inquiring if they graduated would be asked).

Transferability

Transferability is the ability of the data to either be generalized or transferred to other settings or contexts. In a qualitative study the transferability depends on the

researcher (Trochim, 2006). In this study the interview instrument was designed to elicit data in a manner as to be able to draw conclusions, albeit limited, based on the data collected. The similarity in the respondents' answers to the interview questions was the initial point in the determination of transferability. Since there was a similarity in responses, additional research is needed to determine if the data is transferable to a larger population. The small sample size of a phenomenological study does hinder the ability to draw generalizations, without further research on a larger sample. According to Mason (2010) qualitative studies are labor intensive and they do achieve point of saturation, after which continued research does not necessarily lead to increased knowledge with a relatively few participants when contrasted to a quantitative study. For a phenomenological study the saturation point is between 5-25 participants (Creswell, 1998).

Dependability

In a qualitative study, dependability is dependent on the researcher. The researcher is responsible for reporting changes in setting, as an example, that may affect or interfere with data collection (Trochim, 2006). In order to minimize the effect of setting changes, as an example, in this study all participants will be asked the same questions, regardless of the settings. The research instrument did not require a participant to be in a particular setting to complete the instrument. However, all interviews were conducted telephonically, with the respondent in their office.

Confirmability

Confirmability, the ability for the results to be confirmed, (Trochim, 2006) was provided for through the standardization of the research instrument and the record keeping. By keeping the transcripts of the interviews it is possible for other researchers to confirm the conclusions of the study. A crucial step in confirmability is that the development of the study instrument, the conduct of the interviews, the resulting analysis and the reporting of the collected data is free from ethnocentric influences (all conducted with ethnocentric blinders on).

Ethical Procedures

For this study the inclusion criteria was that the respondent be a county manager decision maker for the county and that they were at least 18 years of age will be the focus of the study. This inclusion criterion was selected since the county managers are in the best position to answer the research questions. Institutional approval was requested and granted by Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before any research was conducted and data collected.

All participants were provided with informed consent at least twice before the collection of data. No demographic information (e.g., gender, race, etc.) was collected. Prior to the interview session, each participant was made aware that the data is being collected as part of research pertaining to a Doctoral Degree. This was conveyed to the participants in the communications sent to them (e.g., letter, emails, and consent form).

The collected data was reported in an anonymous manner that prevents the disclosure of a respondent's identity. The study's raw data is being safeguarded, with the raw data being stored in a safe for five years after approval of dissertation by Walden University. At that time the paper copies of the interviewee transcription will be shredded as will the Compact disk with electronic copies of the data.

There was no identifiable conflict of interest related to this study and no incentives were used to increase the willingness of a person to participant in the study.

An IRB application was completed and approved. A prior consent notice was developed for inclusion in IRB packet. The IRB packet's approval number is 05-09-14-002342.

Treatment of Human Participants

The study participants were county managers and at least 18 years of age. Prior to the study a consent form was sent to each study participant. Prior to the study institutional permissions was obtained.

Data were collected manually during the interviews. The raw data were initially recorded on a copy of the questionnaire and then collated on a matrix with the questions as the row and the participants as the columns. This allowed for the similarity or divergence of responses to be readily apparent. The respondent's answers were summarized in the matrix cell. As an example, if the participant stated that they used cost benefit analysis and group decision support systems as decision making methods, these two responses can be entered into a matrix cell as "CBA," and "GDSS" as methods used.

There were no ethical concerns related to recruitment materials. No participants ask to be removed from the study after the interview was conducted. If that had happened all data collected from that participant would have been destroyed and not included in the reporting of the study's results.

Data were treated as anonymous, though a participant may self-identify when reading the data report through answers they provided to questions. Data is being archived in accordance with IRB policy. All raw data is being stored in a safe and upon approval, electronic data transfer to CD.

Summary

This phenomenology based study researched 10 county decision makers from eight rural and two urban counties in North Carolina. This ratio closely reflects the states ratio of rural to urban counties. The data for this study was collected during interviews with the participants. The following questions guided this study:

1. What methods are being used by public policy practitioners in county management decision making in North Carolina?
2. Do North Carolina county management decision makers consider second order and third order effects when making public policy action decisions?
3. What is the relationship, if any, between the number of years of tenure a North Carolina county decision maker has and the likelihood of their use of a formalized decision making methodology?

IRB approval was obtained prior to any of the interviews taking place. Data was collected during the interviews by recording the participant's answers on a copy of the survey questions. The next chapter is a detail the results of the research.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purposes of this qualitative study were twofold. The first purpose was to determine what methods are being used by North Carolina's county managers as they make public policy decisions. The second purpose was to determine if North Carolina's county managers are using a methodology that allows for an analysis of potential second and third order effects of the public policy prior to the policy's enactment. Directing the purpose were the research questions for this study:

1. What methods are being used by public policy practitioners in county management decision making in North Carolina?
2. Do North Carolina county management decision makers consider second order and third order effects when making public policy action decisions?
3. What is the relationship, if any, between the number of years of tenure a North Carolina county decision maker has and the likelihood of their use of a formalized decision making methodology?

These questions were answered via interviews with county managers who, as a matter of course, make public policy recommendations and are decision makers.

The remainder of this chapter will present the setting of the research, the participants demographics, the how and what of the data collection, data analysis, data trustworthiness and the results of the study.

Pilot Study

A pilot study as such was not conducted. During the design and development of the research survey questions, they were presented to several coworkers for a review of question clarity and understanding. During this review, modifications of the questions were made, however once the questions were submitted as part of the IRB process no changes were made to the questions.

Setting

During the data collection, the inability of several participants to readily be available for interviews resulted in the data collection taking longer than planned. The research participants were county managers from several counties within North Carolina. The start of the data collection corresponded to the end of the state's fiscal years and finalization of the next fiscal year's budget. Several participants were not available for interviews until after the start of the state's new fiscal year of July 1, 2014. Another county manager was a new hire that spent June and July meeting with department heads, county commissioners and county employees. The interview was rescheduled twice. Other than increasing the time for data collection, there was no apparent impact on the data collection from outside conditions.

Demographics

As described in Chapter 3, the study population was to be 10 county decision makers in North Carolina, ideally the county manager. Counties for the study initially

included eight rural counties and two urban counties approximating the overall state ration of rural to urban counties.

Not all of the planned county managers were willing to participate in the study. This necessitated finding replacements for those who either failed to return calls to schedule an appointment, or declined to participate. For those counties from the original list that did not participate, they were replaced with a county with the same demographic of either being a rural or urban county.

The replacement of the county manager with a county manager from the same demographic county (in all cases rural counties) kept the ratio of urban to rural counties close to the states actual ration of urban to rural counties. The replacement county managers where sufficient to meet the purpose of this study and other than increasing the length of the data collection period the replacements had no effect on the study. The participants were numbered (1-10) in the order the interviews were conducted. No participant was informed where they were in the interview sequence, that is, Number 2. In the collection of the data the participants were identified not by their county but by their sequence in the order of the conduction of the interviews.

Data Collection

In an effort to survey at least 10 county managers, in total eighteen managers were contacted. The original ten county managers were contacted by letter (Appendix A) which included the research questionnaire (Appendix B) and the consent form (Appendix C). These managers were contacted by a follow up email and a phone call (in some cases

multiple phone calls). For the additional county managers, they were initially contacted by email (Appendix D), after it was determined that four of the original ten managers did not receive their mailed letter and then with phone calls to their office. Each e-mail sent to an add-on county manager contained the questionnaires and the consent form.

The location for the data collection in all cases was the county manager's office. Data was collected telephonically with the researcher placing a call to the participant's office. I placed these calls either from his place of work or from his home.

Data were collected one time from each participant. The initial county managers identified for the study were contacted after IRB approval of the research (Walden IRB approval number 05-09-14-0023427). The initial participant interview was made on June 18, 2014 with the final interview being conducted on August 12, 2014.

Data were collected by asking each participant the same questions from the IRB approved questionnaire). Interviews varied in length from 30 – 55 minutes, with the majority being completed in approximately 45 minutes. The longer duration interviews were due to two reasons: (a) the garrulousness of the participant and (b) the participant asking questions of the researcher.

The questions asked of the researcher were usually of his background, or what he planned to do after degree completion. These questions asked by the participants served to develop a rapport between participant and researcher. In one instance, the participant was initially unwilling to participate, after asking the researcher some questions, the participant agreed to the interview, which became one of the longer interviews.

The data were collected from each participant by being manually recorded on a copy of the questionnaire. Each question was asked and the participant's answer was written down in a summary form. The response was then repeated back to the participant to ensure that the researcher had heard and transcribed the participant's response correctly. After each interview, a pdf copy was made of the interview.

As described in Chapter 3, I planned to have each interview electronically recorded. That did not happen during data collection since the telephone used for the majority of the data collection did not have a provision to attach a recording device. Data reliability and validity was not compromised since I repeated the participant's response back to each participant, in the case of lengthy answer these were paraphrased back to the participant and accuracy of the responses were maintained.

There were no unusual circumstances encountered in the data collection. While the length of time to collect the data was unexpected, it occurred due to the state's (North Carolina) end of the fiscal year and the final development of the state's new fiscal year fiscal plan. Several of the latter participants were deeply involved in their county's budget process and their interviews had to be scheduled after the start of the states' new fiscal year on July 1.

Data Analysis

Consistent with the phenomenological research method, the study employed interviews with county managers. The phenomenological method records the experiences of the participants as recorded by the researcher. During interviews with the participants,

the researcher captures the participant's experiences. During this study, the capturing of the participant's experiences was performed by the asking of and answering to questions from a standardized questionnaire. The use of the standardized questionnaire ensured that the same questions were asked of each participant.

After the completion of the interviews, data collected from the interviews were analyzed for each question with commonality of responses being noted. This analysis was done without using analytical software.

No software was used since the analysis was conducted using emergent theme analysis. The responses were placed in a table. In the table the participants were the rows, numbered according to the order in which the interview took place. Since only the researcher knew the order of the interviews, this method of identifying the participants helped to preserve the participants' anonymity. The questions were the column headings. Use of the matrix allowed the commonality of responses to readily be ascertained.

As commonality of responses were being developed, the participant's responses were either added to the common results (e.g., highest level of education attained), or identified as another result. Thus, each participant's answer was considered and commonality could be identified. Examples of commonality that were identified include the level of education—all participants have a bachelor's degree and half have a MPA. Another was that the majority of participants had received professional education related to serving as a county manager, yet they could not identify any training on decision

making during their professional education. The identified commonalities are further explained in the results section of this chapter.

Since the analysis was manually performed, discrepant response also provided data used in determining if the research questions were answered. As an example, eight of the interviewees had received professional education pertaining to their position, other than degree producing education, with seven having attended the same program. The one participant who attended another program still fit the commonality of having received professional education. The respondents who had not received such training reported that they had received decision making training either in their graduate degree, or through another program such as continuing education (one respondent). All participants reported that they had at one time or another received training on decision making methods.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The creditability of the data, as described in Chapter 3, is the credibility of the research as viewed by the participants (Trochim, 2006). Several questions were presented multiple times in the questionnaire to ensure the truthfulness of the data. All participants were asked the same questions. When asked these questions the second time there was no instances of an answer's intent changing. While words may have changed, the essence (intent) did not change. Often the asking of the question the second time resulted in an anecdote being offered by the participant as a means of detailing their answer.

Transferability

Transferability, per Chapter 3, is the ability of the data to either be generalized or transferred to other settings or contexts. In a qualitative study the transferability depends on the researcher (Trochim, 2006). In this study the interview instrument was designed to elicit data in a manner as to be able to draw conclusions, albeit limited, based on the data collected. The similarity or lack of similarity in the respondents' answers to the interview questions will be the initial point in the determination of transferability.

During the data collection it became apparent that the data being collected was transferable. As an example seven participants attended the University of North Carolina's School of Government, thus an assumption that can be made, though it would need further research for verification, is that North Carolina county managers may be expected to have attended the University of North Carolina's School of Government. An additional transferable item was the manner in which the managers were hired by a hiring action within their county but they serve at the pleasure of their respective county board of commissioners.

Dependability

Per Chapter 3, in a qualitative study, dependability is dependent on the researcher. The researcher is responsible for reporting changes in setting, as an example, that may affect or interfere with data collection (Trochim, 2006). All participants were asked the same questions, using the same research instrument. All participants had their interviews conducted over the telephone. The research instrument did not require a participant to be

in a particular setting to complete the instrument; however, all participants were in the same type of setting during their interviews, their office.

Confirmability

Chapter 3 states that conformability, the ability for the results to be confirmed, (Trochim, 2006) will be provided for through the standardization of the research instrument and record keeping. During this study the participant's responses to the questions of the research instrument were recorded manually by the researcher and then repeated back to the participant to ensure that the participants answer was properly understood. By asking the same questions to each participant it is possible for the result to be duplicated by other researchers. The raw transcripts of the interviews allow for other researchers to confirm the conclusions of the study thru their own analysis.

Results

The purposes of this qualitative study were: (a) to determine what methods are being used by North Carolina's county managers, as they make public policy decisions and (b) to determine if North Carolina's county managers are using an effects based methodology that allows for an analysis of potential second and third order effects of the public policy prior to the policy's enactment.

One item that was identifiable from the research is that county managers in North Carolina make decisions but those decisions are more concerned with the day-to-day operation of county offices. Even then, North Carolina county managers do not have the ability to make decisions over all county employees (e.g. the sheriff and sheriff

department personnel). County managers do make public policy recommendations to their board of commissioners who ultimately make the public policy decision. However, the county commissioners are responsible for the research and analysis of an issue and presenting a recommendation to the board of county commissioners. Thus, while they do not ultimately make the decision they make the recommendation to the board and in most cases the board adopts the recommendation of the county manager. Therefore, the county managers are de facto decision makers.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 sought to determine the decision making methods that are being used by North Carolina county managers in their decision making. This was determined through asking the participants several questions. Question 7 asked the participants if they [used] a decision making method or methodology as part of [their] public policy decision or recommendation process. Question 8 asked the participants to identify the methodology. Later in the questionnaire these questions were asked again as questions 13 and 28. In only one case did the answers given to questions 7 and 8 differ from the answers for questions 13 and 28. Table 5 presents the methods being used.

Table 5

Decision Making Methods Being Used By North Carolina County Managers (Research Question 1)

Participant	RQ1: Decision Making Methods Being Used
1	Process of elimination
2	Analysis of the issue; Pros and cons
3	CBA, ROI, Experience
4	Decision tree, Analysis of the problem
5	Fly by seat of pants
6	Analysis of the problem
7	Analysis of the problem
8	Course of action determination
9	Analysis of the problem
10	Depends on issue - Analysis of the problem

The results show two things. First, the results show that the study participants do use an identifiable methodology in their decision-making process. All participants reported using some type of methodology when making public policy decisions. Secondly, the results show that there is no single methodology being used by public policy practitioners in county management in North Carolina.

Methods being used include implementation of process of elimination; review of pros and cons; Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA); experience; decision tree; fly by seat of pants; and problem identification, followed by review of courses of action, then presentation of best course of action. Several participants reported using more than one method depending on the issue being considered.

The most frequently reported method, with 80% of the respondents using it, can be described as analysis of the problem methodology. In the method the participants

reported that they identify the problem, identify possible solutions, then they make a recommendation to the board of county commissioners based on the county manager's analysis of the issue being considered. Table 6 shows the frequency of the methods being used.

Table 6

Frequency of the Methods

Percentage	Method
80%	Analysis of the problem
10%	CBA, ROI, Experience
10%	Fly by seat of pants

The most common methodology being used by eight of the respondents was analysis of the problem. Five of the respondents identified this method by name, with the other three respondents calling it something different (e.g., process of elimination, analysis of the issue and course of action determination) but when asked to describe the steps they took in making their decisions, they described an analysis of the problem methodology. In general terms an analysis of the problem includes steps that identify the problem, development of feasible actions to undertake to alleviate the problem, analysis of the feasible actions to identify the best action to take and implementation of the selected action.

Participant 1's method of process of elimination was described by as using established county policies, coupled with identification of potential solutions to the issue at hand. The participant stated that they look at policy guides and then through a process

of elimination determine which policy should guide their decision. During their determination of which solution to use the participant considered effects of their process on constituents to ensure fairness and the impact on the county's population—that one demographic group would not be more impacted than another—presenting the appearance of fairness to all.

Participant 2 stated they use analysis of the issue/evaluation of pros and cons as their evaluation method. Through the example they presented, how to balance the budget with a fixed inflow of funds, versus changing needs (expenditures), the participant described the process of looking at the pros and cons that could happen if a particular course of action was undertaken. Through their analysis of the course of actions and the potential effects from an action, the participant would arrive at a decision and present it to their board of commissioners. Thus, while not calling it an analysis of the problem in effect that is what the participant does in their decision making.

Participant 3's method consists of using Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA), combined with an analysis on the return of investment (ROI) and coupled with experience focused on the fiscal cost of the action. Here, as in the literature research, the benefit for CBA is the lowest cost, not the most benefit for those who will be affected by the policy action or decision. While, this participant did use CBA as their method on analysis, they do perform an analysis of the problem. However, while other participants who used an analysis of the problem sought to seek out the best course of action to take, this

participant's method sought to seek the lowest cost solution, with the greatest return of investment.

Participant 5's method of flying by the seat of their pants is an unique method. This respondent's method is actually an informal analysis of the problem. It is not included as part of the analysis of the problem results since the respondent stated that they do not use a formalized method, while the other respondents did. Participant 5's stated that they "try to foresee," liabilities as they make their decisions. Through this analysis of liabilities they are indeed performing an analysis of the problem, though the participant did not recognize it as such. Even though an argument can be made that this participant does use

Participant 8's method of course of action determination method ties the situation to the course of action. In doing so, the county manager analyzes the current situation and then determines which course of action to use. This participant reported that they also seek input from other stakeholders. In the ensuing discussion, guided by the manager, the stakeholders review potential solutions and ultimately select the one to be presented to the board of county commissioners.

The county managers (participants 4, 6, 7, and 10) that reported using an analysis of the problem methodology had similar characteristics in their various methods. In every instance the managers identified the problem. They identified an objective to be achieved and then they looked at various methods to achieve the result before deciding on the action to take. What was missing was a method to monitor the results of the implemented

action. While not fully matching a methodology from the literature research, there are similarities between the methods of problem analysis used by the county managers and the method described by Walker (2000).

Participant 4 uses a decision tree to assist in their analysis of the problem. By outlining the problem and then following steps in the decision tree this county manager uses a highly formalized process to make their decisions. Participant 6 initially reported in their response to question 7 that they “do not use a predefined process,” yet in their response to question 28 they outlined a process consisting of the following steps: defining the issue, determining the primary mission or goals that will be impacted by the issue, gathering of information to include that from stakeholders, then determination of actions to be taken, selection of the best action, and implementation of the decision.

Inherent in Participant 6’s response was a legal review that was mentioned as occurring several times in the process—legal review when identifying the problem to ensure that county has the legal authority to resolve the problem and when a final decision has been made.

Participant 7’s response indicated that they analyze the problem by looking at it and then determine the best course of action to take to resolve the problem. Participant 10 reported that they do use an analysis of the problem; however how formal the process is depends upon the issue. Some issues have just two solutions and thus an informal (quick) analysis can be used, while other situations require a more structured process with a formalized process being used.

The results of the first research question—determine the decision making methods that are being used by North Carolina county managers in their decision making—showed that the county managers in this study do use a methodology and the methods were identified. Research question 1 showed that 80% of the respondent use a formalized methodology when the definition of formalized is defined as clear steps in a process. While the literature research results were reinforced, in that there is not a single methodology being used, the research results show that 90% of the respondents used a similar methodology (Participant 5's method of flying by the seat of their pants is included in this number). While the steps undertaken by each respondent may not be identical, the majority of respondents analyzed the problem before acting on it.

Research Question 2

The second research question was to establish if North Carolina county management decision makers consider second order and third order effects when making public policy action decisions. The definitions for these effects, for the purposes of this study were: second order effects—effects, usually unintended brought about by an action (Gowen, 2005) and third order effects—effects that result from second order effects, usually unintended effects (Gowen, 2005). Each participant was provided with these definitions prior to the interview for a commonality of terminology.

The answer to this research question was determined through two survey questions. Survey question 9 asked if the participants considered effects of the public policy on constituents – those who will be effected by the policy or recommendation.

Survey question 10 asked the participants if they considered effects beyond the primary effects level (second or third level effects – potential unintended consequences). Table 7 shows the participants' answers for the first sub-question (question 9) of the research question, the consideration of effects.

The participants reported that they do consider effects when making their decisions (question 9). Half of the respondents simply stated that they did consider the effects their decisions would have on their constituents by the policy or recommendation. Even with the question asked a second time (question 29) these respondents simply stated that they considered the primary effect of their actions without elaboration.

Table 7

Consideration of Effects of Public Policy on Constituents (Question 9)

Participant	Consideration Of Primary Effects
1	Yes especially fairness, community demographics
2	Bounded by rationality
3	Short, mid, and long term effects
4	Yes
5	Yes
6	Yes
7	Yes
8	Yes, have to thing politically NOT financially
9	Yes
10	Absolutely – especially during personnel policies

Participant 1's expression of considering primary effects for fairness coupled with the community demographics showed that their consideration is based on a perceived need to be seen by the community as being fair to all. Thus, this participant tempered

their decision-making on the appearance that one community group was not seen as being treated differently than another.

Participant 2's statement of bounded by rationality meant that they consider the effects bounded by a rationality belief that the effect may occur. Thus, they may not fully consider all potential effects if they just consider those effects that are rationally determined to occur, since a non-rational effect may occur. The participant gave an example of this bounded rationality: the county budget has to be balanced, if a need occurs for new equipment (specifically a high dollar vehicle) then how could the budget be balanced if this new expenditure increased the budget beyond its funding through taxes? Other expenditures may have to be reduced or eliminated. By looking at all the pros and cons and the effects of the various courses of action available, the manager arrives at the most rational decision, which is presented to the county board of commissioners for adoption.

Participant 3 offered that they do consider the short, mid-term, and long term effects of a decision on people. They elaborated that the any benefit (good) of the short term effect could be offset by negative consequences over time. As an example, a need to pay for county services through increase property taxes could impact the finances of those on a fixed income and decrease the discretionary spending of others. Another result of increased taxes is that people leave the county for a county with lower tax rates thus a decreasing tax base, often without a decrease in the cost for services.

Participant 8 recognized that it is important to think politically not financially when making a decision. The intent of this response was to show that one needs to consider the effects of a decision on those who will bear its burden—the political. Thus participant 8 realizes that those who use a Cost Benefit Analysis method frequently consider the financial benefit instead of the benefit to the person.

Participant 10's example of considering effects during personnel policies alludes that though they claim to consider effects when making decisions, they may in fact only consider effects when making decisions related to the county work force. However in their response to question 29, they did state that they consider effects in their decision – making, thus the example of during personnel policy formularization may be just the example that came to mind when answering question 9.

The study's participants reported that they do consider second or third order effects (question 10) when making public policy action decisions or recommendations to the board of county commissioners. Table 8 shows the participants' answers for the second sub-question (question 10) of the research question, the consideration of effects beyond the primary effects level.

Table 8

Consideration of Second Order and Third Order Effects (Question 10)

Participant	Consideration of Effects Beyond The Primary Effects Level
1	Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA)
2	Yes, especially during budget process
3	Yes
4	Yes, know what impact of decision is to avoid a ripple effect
5	Try to foresee long term liabilities
6	If sufficient information allows
7	Yes
8	Yes, brings others to table
9	Yes, determine unintended, take time
10	Absolutely

Participant 1 stated that they consider second and third order effects through the application of cost benefit analysis (CBA). However, they stated that they look at the benefit, which they equated to effects. Further questioning revealed that the benefit most looked at was cost and therefore their consideration of effects was to prevent costs from rising. Participant one further stated that the benefits were considered to ensure fairness to all would be affected by the decision.

Participant 2 states that they do consider other effects beyond the primary effect especially during budget discussions. The respondent's intent here was to show that during the budget process they look at the potential negative effects an increase in the budget could have on the county to include businesses and residents.

Participant 3 stated that they consider short, mid, and long range effects in their decision making. While not the exact definition of second, and third order effects, the

participants' discussion showed that in their consideration of the short, mid, and long range they are really considering the potential of unintended consequences.

Participant 4's consideration of second and third levels effects was to ensure that there were no unintended negative consequences that could overturn any positive effects of the policy decision. The analysis on potential negative effects does increase the possibility that as a policy is implemented those negative effects can be mitigated if not avoided.

Participant 5's analysis of second and third order effects was to determine what potential liabilities exist as a policy is place into effect. Liabilities not meant in the legal sense but as a negative consequence. Thus, they do look to determine if there are potential unexpected negative effects.

Participant 6 only considers effects beyond the primary effect if there is sufficient information to do so. Thus, if there is not enough information they will to consider the possibility of other effects. Participant 7 did not offer in either responding to question 9 or 30 when they consider second or third order effects, just simply that they do.

Participants 8 and 9 had similar responses to the considered of second and third order effects. Participant 8, in their consideration of the effects sought out the input of others to make sure that all potential effects were considered. Participant 9 stated that they seek to determine what may happen and that they take time to do so.

Participant 10 stated that they do consider the potential for effects beyond the intended effect when they make the policy recommendations and decisions. This

reinforces the thought, in their response to question 9, the example of personnel actions was merely an example and not the only time they considered the effects of their policy actions.

Through an analysis of these two questions (questions 9 and 10) it is shown that of the participants do consider the primary effects of their decision making but also 70% of the participants do consider second and third order effects. In doing so research question 2 is answered—North Carolina county management decision makers do consider primary effects; and second order and third order effects when making public policy action decisions. However, the methods used in consideration of second and third order effects vary greatly. Unlike research question 1 where 80% of the respondents used a similar method in their decision making, the respondents use a variety of methods to consider second and third order effects.

Research Question 3

The third research question was designed to determine the relationship, if any, between the number of years of tenure a North Carolina county decision maker has and the likelihood of their use of a formalized decision making methodology. Research question 1 showed that 80% of the respondent use a formalized methodology when the definition of formalized is defined as clear steps in a process.

The one respondent who did not use a formalized process, participant 5, has eight years of tenure in their position. The range of time on the job for the interviewed county

managers ranged from 11 weeks to 15 years tenure in their current position. The average time in tenure was 5.55 years. Table 9 shows the tenure (in years) of the respondents.

Table 9

Tenure As A County Manager-Current Position (Research Question 3)

Participant	Tenure (years)
1	2
2	12.75
3	0.21
4	15
5	8
6	7
7	1.5
8	3.83
9	0.17
10	5 yrs

Other Results From The Research Not Related To The Research Questions

Other information emerged from the research that while not contributing the answering of one of the research questions none-the-less provided insight on decision making.

Each respondent had at least a Bachelor degree and five had graduate level degrees, all of them holding a MPA. Seven of the interviewees reported that they had attended the University of North Carolina School of Government City and County Manager program. One interviewee attended a similar program at another institution. These eight interviewees either remembered, or were sure that they had received formularized training on decision making during their professional schooling but none

could recall a specific method that they were trained on. Table 10 shows the education results.

Table 10

Education

Participant	Education level	Professional Education
1	MPA	None
2	MPA	UNC School of Government
3	MPA	Kennedy School of Government
4	MPA	UNC School of Government
5	BA	UNC School of Government
6	BS	UNC School of Government
7	BA	UNC School of Government
8	BS	UNC School of Government
9	BA	UNC School of Government
10	MPA	None

The education level (50% of the participants hold an MPA, with have either a BA or BS degree), does not affect the participants use of a decision making methodology.

The one participant who reported that they “fly by the seat of their pants in their decision making holds a MPA, while 30% of the respondent who reported using an analysis of the problem methodology have either a BA or BS degree.

Questions 32 and 33 were designed to determine if the respondents would do anything differently if either appointed (political appointee) or elected to their position. Only one interviewee (Participant 1) stated that they would do things differently if appointed. They stated that they would do so, since being “an appointee would make them more risk averse,’ thus they would be more circumspect in their decision making.

The aversion to risk for this participant's decision making would possibly result in a more formal decision making process to ensure that all possible actions were considered or the opposite with no decisions being made.

Five of the respondents indicated that they would not do anything different if they were elected instead of being hired. Participant 3 stated that they would do things "the exact same way, making good decisions for and presenting them to other elected officials." Participant 4 stated that they would "still use the same process—making the best recommendation for the board and citizens." Participants 6, 8, and 9 simply stated that they would not do anything different if elected.

Three respondents reported that they would do things different if an elected official. Participant 1 stated that if an elected official they would do what the constituents wanted, regardless of effects, since doing what constituents wanted is what got one elected and kept them in office. Participant 5 stated that they would do things differently if elected since they would have more authority. As an elected official they would have hiring and firing authority, something they do not have at the present time. Though the county manager, the Register of Deeds and the Sheriff do not report to them and are independent. Participant 7 echoed Participant 1 that as an elected official they would be more "of a hostage to the voters and influenced by what the voters wanted."

The two remaining respondents Participants 2 and 10 would probably not do anything different if elected. Participant 2 stated that they "may have to from time-to-time," however they did not really see them doing so. Participant 10 stated that since they

had never served in an elected position they hoped they would not do things differently than they do now. Table 11 shows these results.

Table 11

Would Use A Different Method

Participant	Different Method If Elected	Different Method If Appointed
1	Yes, do what constituents want	Yes more risk adverse
2	Perhaps, hopes would not	No
3	No	No
4	No	No
5	Yes – more authority if elected	No
6	No	No
7	Yes – more tied to what voters want	No
8	No	No
9	No	No
10	Probably not	No

While all of the interviewees were hired, they are also akin to an appointee since they serve at the pleasure of their board of commissioners. If a sufficient number of board members become opposed to the county manager they can fire that manager. Unlike other state or county employees who have rights to appeal a personnel decision (e.g., termination) county managers do not have that right. Even though, every interviewee describes being interested in the welfare and well being of the residents in the counties that they serve.

The county managers as a whole do not consider the proceedings of the federal government in their recommendation process. All respondent indicated that they the federal government has little to no impact on their actions. They do look to what polices

are being decided by the federal government especially when the policy will reduce federal aid (dollars) to a state.

Participant 2 stated that federal government actions (congressional or otherwise) do have an impact on their decisions. Participant 2's views were shared by Participants 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10. The reduction of federal dollars to a state does concern the respondents since they are more concerned on the impact of state government decisions than the federal government. The examples provided included changes guidelines on social service programs such as food stamps and reductions in pharmaceutical programs. A decrease in the funds provided to the state trickles down to the county resulting in less benefits for the citizens that need the services, however the decrease in funding is not offset by a decrease in need. Thus, the county manager has to determine if they reduce other services to keep the funding at a level needed to provide the benefits. The same county manager also mentioned that when the state reduces its funding, such as for education the same type of decisions have to be made. What services can be reduced, or can taxes be increased in order to keep funding at the level expected to provide a service.

While the respondents did report using software as part of their daily office operations (e.g. MS Office ® products), only two respondents reported using list servers to assist in their recommendation process. Another respondent stated they do use Geographical Information System software as needed in developing their recommendations. Other than these examples, no other respondent used software to assist in the development of their public policy recommendations development.

Summary

The data collection answered the research questions. For question 1 it was determined what methods are being used by public policy practitioners in county management in North Carolina. Question 2 was answered—North Carolina county managers, based on the research population, do consider primary, second, or third order effects when making public policy action decisions or recommendations to the board of county commissioners. The data collected shows that for the last research question, that there was not a relationship between the number of years of tenure a North Carolina county decision maker has and the likelihood of their use of a formalized decision making methodology

The next chapter will reiterate the purpose this study and summarize the key findings. The results of research confirm the findings of the literature review and that will be more fully discussed in the next chapter. Finally, recommendations for further research along with the impact of this study for positive social change will be described.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Purpose and Nature of the Study

The purposes of this qualitative study were twofold. The first purpose was to determine what methods North Carolina's county managers are using as they make public policy decisions. The second purpose was to determine if North Carolina's county managers are using an effects based methodology that allows for an analysis of potential second and third order effects of the public policy prior to the policy's enactment. Inherent in any research, beyond the stated purpose, is an unstated purpose, to add to the body of knowledge. In this case, to contribute to the body of knowledge in public policy decision making, by identifying the methods used in North Carolina's county public policy action decision making. The use of a phenomenological research method allowed the participants of this study to freely report what they actually do when making decisions.

Key Findings

The key concept studied was to determine if North Carolina county managers, when making public policy decisions used a methodology. From this result, the next concept investigated was to determine if there is one standard methodology, or if various methods were used. Following the first two determinations, the next step was to determine if North Carolina county management decision makers do consider second order and beyond effects when making public policy action decisions. Lastly, did tenure

in position effect a North Carolina county manager's use of a decision making methodology?

Results showed that 80% of the North Carolina county decision makers interviewed used a similar method of analysis of the problem, with the remaining 20% using another method. While there are differences within the steps taken by the several county managers, the overall similarity is sufficient that analysis of the problem is the most common method used. However, other methods were used as well. Researchers suggested there would not be a single method being used and that analysis of the problem would not be the most common method. The results conflict with the literature research. While there was not a common method amongst the respondents, every respondent used a method when making decisions and the majority used a similar method.

The research results show that 70% of the participants do consider second order and beyond effects when making public policy action decisions. Of the remaining participants another 10% do consider second order and beyond effects when making public policy action decisions in sufficient information allows.

Tenure, time in current position, with a range from 0.17 to 15 years was not a factor in a participant's use of a decision making methodology, with all participants reporting that they used some type of methodology. The education level, 50% of the participants hold an MPA with all having either a BA or BS degree, does not impact the participants use of a decision making methodology.

What is unclear is where the respondents learned how to use an analysis of the problem as their decision making method. Eight of the respondents had attended a professional level education program (not a degree producing program) related to their position, however when pressed none of these respondents could remember receiving instruction a specific decision-making methodology during this education

Interpretation of the Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question confirmed my research hypotheses. All participants reported using some type of decision making methodology. North Carolina county managers, when engaged in public policy decision making, do use a methodology. The study confirmed findings in the literature that one standard methodology was not being used and multiple methods are used in public policy decision making, at least by county managers in North Carolina.

The results did not confirm the most common method of public policy decision making in the literature review, Cost Benefit Analysis, as the most commonly used methodology of the study participants. The most common methodology to emerge from the study is akin to the method identified by Walker (2000). Walker's method begins with an analysis of an objective, proceeding to an analysis of a more complex problem. In this method the user collects information, analyzes that information, then disseminates that information to the stakeholders for the policy being discussed (Walker, 2000).

Research Question 2

The next research question—do North Carolina county management decision makers consider second order and third order effects when making public policy action decisions?—was answered by the research with 70% of the participants reporting that they do consider second order and third order effects when making public policy action decisions. Of the remaining participants 10% reported that they do consider second order and third order effects when making public policy action decisions if “sufficient information allows” for that determination. Another 10% stated that in performing a Cost Benefit Analysis to determine the best return on investment in their decision making they would look at future effects. The final 10% reported that they “try to foresee long term liabilities—negative impacts as they make their decisions.

The literature suggests that public policy decision makers do not consider second and third order effects in their policy actions. The study research showed that North Carolina county managers do consider effects: primary, second, and beyond effects when making their policy determinations.

Research Question 3

The final research question—the relationship, if any, between the number of years of tenure (in current position) a North Carolina county decision maker has and the likelihood of their use of a formalized decision making methodology—found that there was no relationship between tenure and the likelihood of using a formalized decision making methodology.

Theoretical Interpretation

The theoretical framework of this study was Lindblom's theory of incrementalism in decision making. In this theory Lindblom (1958) stated that public policy decisions "are attempts to correct mistakes of previous policies" (p. 306). Lindblom described a policy analysis decision making system based on incrementalism, wherein one policy follows another. In this system changes are evaluated against the present situation, then as policies are implemented the expected results from each implementation is anticipated and compared to the desired result (pp 300-306).

From the study's results and the methods being used by the county managers the theory of incrementalism does hold. The county managers, as an example described having to juggle fiscal realities, increasing costs, with limited resources to spend to meet the needs of their constituents. This was a systemic problem, as more than one participant described that fiscal problems are constant with each yearly budget cycle. The problem remains while the fixes continue year after year. Perhaps Lindblom's theory of incrementalism is more aptly described as placing a band-aid on a non-healing wound, instead of trying to heal the wound.

Through the use of the research method of phenomenology, as envisioned by Moustakas (1994). Through the medium of telephonic interviews, with each participant asked the same questions, it was possible to answer the research questions.

The study's proposition, identified in Chapter 1, was that public policy practitioners do not employ a methodology for determining the effects that a public

policy action will have on the citizenry. This notion is supported within the research literature. The study showed public policy practitioners do employ a methodology for determining the effects that a public policy action will have on the citizenry.

The research shows 90% of study population used a similar method. In contradiction to the research literature, this method was not Cost Benefit Analysis, the expected most common method. The study's participants reported considering primary, second, and third order effects when formulating their decisions.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to analysis of the decision making methods in use by 10 county managers in North Carolina. Other local governments (e.g., cities, towns, incorporations) are not included in this study. The study participants did not need a working knowledge of all public policy decision making methods. As an example, a county manager using cost benefit analysis as a decision making methodology would not be expected to know how to use a Group Decision Support System methodology.

The intent of the study was to determine if a decision making methodology is being used. Thus, the key is the method or methods used by the respondent, not their knowledge of available public policy decision making methods. The frequency of public policy decision making was not included in this study. The focus was on the use of a public policy decision making methodology, not its frequency of use. The rationale is that

the research was to determine whether the study participants used a decision making methodology, not the frequency of their decision making (e.g., once or twice a week).

Recommendations

Recommendations for further research include:

1. What decision making methods are included in the curriculum of the University of North Carolina's School of Government's courses? Those participants that had attended the University of North Carolina School of Government City and County Manager program did not remember any decision making methods being taught in their education at the school. Does the school introduce students to decision making methods and then does the school provide practical exercise in decision making, such as a case study?
2. An expansion of the study to include all of the 100 North Carolina county managers. If the results show that the managers use a decision making methodology without the benefit of receiving any training on decision making methods in their professional education, then the need for such education could be determined.
3. The most common advance degree held by the study's participants was a MPA. A study of several MPA curriculums can be made to determine if decision making methods are included in the curriculums.

4. Where do public policy decision makers receive education and practical experience on decision making methods? This study only recorded if the participants had received education on decision making methods, not the venue in which it occurred.
5. A study should be made to determine if once a decision is enacted are methods used to determine its effectiveness (e.g., is the original intent of the decision being met) or are unintended results allowed to overtake the process. This could be accomplished by tracking the decision making process and the resultant actions implementation for multiple public policy actions.
6. While the participants self-reported, that they do consider second and third order effects, the respondents as a whole were unable to give examples of how they did so. A study should be made to determine what method is used for the consideration of effects.
7. Expand the study to state legislatures and the Congress to determine why it appears, as the literature research shows that these bodies do not consider second and third order effects in their legislation.

Implications

Implications

This study has contributed to the body of knowledge in public policy action decision making by identifying the methods being used by several North Carolina county

managers in their public policy decision making. The consideration of effects, while stated by all respondents as something they do, needs further research. While it was determined that the respondents state they do consider effects, it was not researched to determine what method is used for the consideration of effects. The research has also shown that the time a county manager's tenure in their position does not increase or decrease their likeliness to use a decision making methodology.

Other implications are that the literature in general did indeed have a gap. While the literature stated that public policy decision makers did not consider effects in making public policy decisions, the research has shown the opposite. The research results show that 70% of the participants do consider second order and beyond effects when making public policy action decisions. Of the remaining participants another 10% do consider second order and beyond effects when making public policy action decisions in sufficient information allows. In confirmation with the research literature a common methodology was not used by public policy decision makers.

With 80% of the North Carolina county decision makers interviewed using a similar method of analysis of the problem and the remaining 20% using another method the question arises where do the managers learn these techniques? Eight of the respondents had attended a professional level education program (not a degree producing program) related to their position, however when pressed none of these respondents could remember receiving instruction a specific decision-making methodology during this education, with similar results for those holding a MPA. If they are not being trained in

decision making methods are they learning on the job? The results imply that the respondents are not learning on the job since even those with the least amount of time in their current position, with a range from 0.17 to 15 years, reported that they used some type a decision making method.

An implication for the schools that offer professional education in county or city management is that not one of the respondents could identify any education they received on decision making methods while attending the education program. Either the schools are not providing instruction in decision making methods, or that the education is so unremarkable that it has been forgotten by the respondents. Since the respondents did not remember if they received instruction on decision making it may be time to introduce another method to aid decision making

Effects-based planning (EBP) could be used as a methodology to make public policy decisions that consider the second and third order effects. Building on the analysis of a problem, effects-based planning provides a methodology in which the measures of effectiveness and measures of performance are assessed. In the analysis of the problem methodology identified as being used by 80% of the respondents to this study, they do not measure effectiveness.

Translating EBP, first adopted by the U.S. military, into a methodology public policy decision makers can use in making decisions simply involves taking the process used by the military and converting the process into nonmilitary language.

In EBP the desired effect is defined. Objectives are established to track the accomplishment of the effect. Tasks to be achieved are tied to the effect, identified and paired with an objective. Performance measures are established to ensure that the tasks are working towards achieving the objective and if not then the tasks are changed to meet the objective. The accomplishment of the objectives results in the desired effect being achieved (Lee & Kupersmith, 2002).

Decision makers, in using EBP, would identify the desired end state, or effect. Nodes (persons, places or things) which are components of the system to be acted on are also identified. In order to track the achievement of the results, the decision maker identifies linkages. The identification of links provides a ways to an end—the accomplishment of the desired effect is to work through nodes and nodes are the ends of a linkage. Nodes (person, places, and things) are assigned an action—the activities that can be applied to a node designed to achieve the effect. Lastly, the decision makers assigned resources—actors that apply the action. Thus, the EBP methodology is Effect, Nodes, Actions, and Resources (ENAR) linked together (Gowen, 2005). The combination of measuring effectiveness through the ENAR and via performance measures ensures that the desired results are achieved; either through modifications to the application of the policy, as shown by the analysis of performance measures, or through modification of the ENAR (Gowen, 2005). Adoption of EBP will add to the literature.

This study challenged the literature to determine if there was indeed a gap in the literature. The gap was confirmed. This study challenged the notion that public policy

decision makers do not consider effects when making decisions. The research has shown that indeed, they do but more research on a larger scale is needed. Lastly, a new challenge has emerged from this study, with an implication for schools. While the respondents state that they are sure they received training on decision making during their professional education (education not in conjunction with a degree) they could not remember what methods they were trained on. Thus, those schools offering the training may need to relook at their curriculums.

Positive Social Change

Walden University defines positive social change as “a deliberative process of creating, and applying ideas, strategies, and actions to promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies” which “results in the improvement of human, and social condition” (Social Change). The findings of this study do offer positive social change.

The first implication for positive social change is that this study contributes to the body of literature. The study has shown that contrary to the research literature, the most common methodology used by public policy decision makers in several counties in North Carolina is a analysis of the problem, not as expected (from the literature research) CBA. Thus, the body of literature is expanded by this study. Expansion of this study to other counties, if not eventually the entire state, will either confirm or repudiate the finding of this study as to the most common methodology being used is indeed analysis of the problem, not CBA.

The second implication builds on the expected positive social change identified in Chapter 1. There the determination of the decision making methods used by public policy decision makers in several counties in North Carolina was identified as an element of positive social change. This study identified the methods being used by the participants, thus adding to the body of knowledge.

The next implication is coupled with the previous one. This study showed that not only do the county managers, of this study, consider primary effects when making decisions, they also consider second and third order effects. By determining this, the body of knowledge is increased, since the research literature showed that the methods used by public policy decision makers, by design only consider the primary effect. However, this study has shown that public policy practitioners do consider second and third order effects. Since 80% of the participants used a variation of analysis of the problem and all participants reported that they consider second and third order effects; does analysis of the problem inherently direct the user to consider all effects, or did the participants of this study apply the method in a way others do not? Further research will determine this and further add to the body of knowledge.

This study, taken as a whole, has positive social impact since it does contribute knowledge to the development of individuals. The participants of this study have a unique role. While they make recommendations to a county board of commissioners, whom ultimately make the decision to implement the county manager's recommendation, the county manager's recommendation is the *defacto* decision that is implemented. The

study has shown that the information gained in this study does add to the body of knowledge and fills gaps in the literature.

Conclusion

The purposes of this qualitative study were: (a) to determine what methods are being used by North Carolina's county managers, as they make public policy decisions. (b) To determine if North Carolina's county managers are using an effects based methodology that allows for an analysis of potential second and third order effects of the public policy prior to the policy's enactment. This study has determined that the North Carolina county manager study participants do use decision making methodology when making public policy decisions. Contrary to the research literature, these managers do consider second and third order effects when making their decision. The tenure of a county manager in their position has no bearing on the use of a decision making methodology.

Despite the purposes of this study being met, additional research is needed. Does public policy professional education provide education on the consideration of effects in decision making? If so where and when? Can the results be duplicated in other locations? Can the results be applied to other levels of government such as state legislatures and the Congress?

This study is just the beginning, it has shown that the participants, through their decision making do not intend to cause harm to the constituents they serve: the population of their counties. They are indeed public servants.

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Appendix A: Participant Request Letter

Jeffrey B. Gowen, PhD(c)
jeffrey.gowen@waldenu.edu
Date

«AddressBlock»

Dear «GreetingLine»:

I am a PhD student in Public Administration conducting research for my dissertation, Methodologies Used in Decision making for Public Policy Planning by County Managers in North Carolina.

The purpose of my research is twofold. The first purpose is to determine what methodologies are being used by North Carolina's county managers as they make public policy decisions. The second purpose is to determine if North Carolina's county managers are using an effects based methodology that allows for an analysis of potential second and third order effects of the public policy prior to the policy's enactment.

I am asking for your assistance in completing my research; would you be willing to be interviewed, either face-to-face, or telephonically? The interview should take no more than 45 minutes and will be scheduled at a time of your convenience.

I have enclosed the interview questions for your review. I have also enclosed a Consent Form for you to complete should you be willing to be interviewed. In case we decide on a telephonic interview, I will need the completed consent form emailed to me (jeffrey.gowen@waldenu.edu) prior to the start of the phone interview.

The information obtained during the interview will be confidential and reported in the results of the research in such a manner as to prevent your identification. You will be assigned a study number and all information reported will use the study number and not a name, as a method to prevent identification.

If you are willing to be interviewed I ask that you please email me at the above email address or call me at 910-303-2545. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey B. Gowen

Appendix B: Research Questionnaire

Definitions to assist you in answering the following questions:

- Public policy actions: collective term for public policy plans, programs, policies, and decisions
- Primary effects: effects intended or expected to occur as a result of a public policy action
- Second order effects: effects, usually unintended brought about by an action
- Third order effects: effects that result from second order effects, usually unintended effects

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been in your current position?
2. How long have you been working here (in total)?
3. How long (years and month) have you been working in county management?
4. As part of your job are you required to make public policy decisions or recommendations? If no - go to 14
5. How long (years and month) have you been working as a decision making role?
6. Who (position only – no names) requires you to make those decisions?
7. Do you use a decision making method or methodology as part of you public policy decision or recommendation process?
8. If so what is the methodology you use?
9. During your decision or recommendations making process do you considered effects of the public policy on constituents – those who will be effected by the policy or recommendation?
10. Do you consider effects beyond the primary effects level (second or third level effects – potential unintended consequences)?
11. What impact on your decision or recommendation making does the perception of the Federal Government importance to the issue influence your process?
12. What impact on your decision or recommendation making does the perception of the State Government importance to the issue influence your process?
13. Would you please describe the method you use in developing either a public policy recommendation or in making a public policy decision?
14. What is the highest level of education that you have obtained (as an example high school graduate, some college, college degree, graduate degree)?
15. During your non-professional education did you receive training or instruction on decision making methodologies? If no - go to 17
16. On which methodologies were you trained or received instruction on?
17. What professional education (education designed to assist you in your career or position) have you received?
18. During your professional education did you receive training or instruction on decision making methodologies?
19. If so on which methodologies were you trained or received instruction on?
20. Other than either in school or during professional training have you been exposed to decision making methodology? If no - go to 24

21. When?
22. Where?
23. How?
24. Do you use software to assist you in making either a public policy recommendation or in making a public policy decision? If no - go to 28
25. If so what software do you use?
26. With what frequency do you use the software (daily, more than one day per week (specify days); weekly, monthly, as needed)?
27. If you use it only as needed, how often is that?
28. Please describe the procedure (steps/process) you use in making a public policy decision or a recommendation?
29. When in the procedure (steps/process) you use in making a public policy decision or a recommendation consider effects that may occur to those who will be effected by the decision or recommendation?
30. When considering the effects of a public policy decision or a recommendation do you consider effects beyond immediate effects?
31. Are you an appointee or hired to your position?
32. If you were an appointee would you use a different methodology?
33. If you were an elected to your current position would you use a decision making methodology? Why?

Appendix C: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of public policy decision making in several counties in North Carolina. The researcher is inviting county decision makers to be in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is being conducted by Jeffrey Gowen, a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is twofold. The first purpose is to determine what methodologies are being used by North Carolina’s county managers as they make public policy decisions. The second purpose is to determine if North Carolina’s county managers are using an effects based methodology that allows for an analysis of potential second and third order effects of the public policy prior to the policy’s enactment.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Meet with the researcher for 30-45 minutes (either face-to-face or telephonically per your convenience.)
- During this meeting you will be asked questions on public policy decision making in your county.
- If necessary, a follow up phone call may be required (at most 10 minutes in length).
- Information collected during the interview will be recorded and kept confidential.
- You will NOT be identified in the reporting of the interviewee results.
- Data will be collected only during the meeting and clarified, if needed with the follow on phone call.

Here are some sample questions:

How long have you been in your current position?

How long have you been working here (in total)?

How long (years and month) have you been working in county management?

As part of your job are you required to make public policy decisions or recommendations? If no - go to 14

How long (years and month) have you been working as a decision making role?

Who (position only – no names) requires you to make those decisions?

Do you use a decision making method or methodology as part of you public policy decision or recommendation process?

If so what is the methodology you use?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or after the study. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as the stress that may occur when being asked questions.

This study will contribute to the body of knowledge in public policy action decision making by identifying the methodologies being used in North Carolina's county public policy action decision making. It will further show if county decision makers are using a viable method of public policy action decision making that includes the consideration of effects in the decision making process. Once an action is enacted are methodologies in place to measure the effectiveness of the action? The information gathered could be used to refine public policy administration instruction at both the undergraduate and graduate level. As an example, if the research shows that there are multiple methods being used, that information could be mapped against the methods being instructed in North Carolina's Colleges and Universities offering programs in public policy administration.

Payment:

There is no payment for your participation in the study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidentially and no participant will be identified in the study. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure, in a safe, for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email @ jeffrey.gowen@waldenu.edu, or 910-303-2545. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 05-09-14-0023427 and it expires on May 8, 2015.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, or replying to this email with the words, "I consent" , I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Appendix D: Additional Participant E-mail

Assistance with PhD Dissertation

Dear _____

I am a PhD Student at Walden University finishing my doctorate in Public Policy Administration. The purpose of my research is twofold. The first purpose is to determine what methodologies are being used by North Carolina's county managers as they make public policy decisions. The second purpose is to determine if North Carolina's county managers are using an effects based methodology that allows for an analysis of potential second and third order effects of the public policy prior to the policy's enactment.

I am asking for your assistance in completing my research; would you be willing to be interviewed, either face-to-face, or telephonically? The interview should take no more than 30 minutes and will be scheduled at a time of your convenience. I have attached the interview questions for your review. I have also attached a consent form for you to complete should you be willing to be interviewed. In case we decide on a telephonic interview, I will need the completed consent form emailed to me (jeffrey.gowen@waldenu.edu) prior to the start of the phone interview. The information obtained during the interview will be confidential and reported in the results of the research in such a manner as to prevent your identification.

I will call your office on _____, to ascertain your willingness to be interviewed. We will then set up a time and the method for the interview (most likely telephonic).

Sincerely,

Jeffrey B. Gowen

Curriculum Vitae

Jeffrey B. Gowen

EDUCATION:**Walden University, Minneapolis, MN**

PhD Candidate, Public Policy Administration

Webster University, St. Louis, MO

1996

M.A. in Human Resource Development (Dual Concentrations in Training Development and Organizational Development)

United States Air Force Academy, U.S.A.F. Academy, CO

1979

BS in Humanities

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

February 2013 – Present Business Development Specialist, North Carolina Military Business Center, Fayetteville Technical Community College.

September 2012 – February, 2013 Director of Business Development. ProTrain, LLC, Raleigh NC

December 2011 – September 2012 Director of Business Development, K3 Enterprises, Inc. Fayetteville, NC

November 2009 – December 2011 Joint Training System Specialist, K3 Enterprises, Inc. Fayetteville, NC

July 2009 – November 2009 Capture Manager, K3 Enterprises, Inc. Fayetteville, NC

June 2008 – July 2009 Training Officer, K3 Enterprises, Inc. Fayetteville, NC

November 2007 – May 2008 Site Manager, Imedia.It, Fayetteville, NC

September 2005 – June 2007 Director of Operations, Advanced Computer Learning Company, Fayetteville, NC

January 2005 - September 2005 Doctrine Analyst and Writer, US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Fort Bragg, NC

June 2001 - September 2004 Director of Distance Education, Southern Regional Area Health Education Center (SRAHEC), Fayetteville, NC

November 2000 - June 2001 Project Manager, Camber Corporation, Fayetteville, NC

April 1997 - September 2000 Project Manager, Cubic Applications Inc., Fayetteville, NC

August 1995 – September 1996 Chief, Civil Affairs Doctrine and Training Division, Directorate of Doctrine and Training, US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Fort Bragg, NC

June 1995 – August 1995 Group S-1, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (A), US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Fort Bragg, NC

May 1995 - June 1995 Secretary of the General Staff, US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Fort Bragg, NC

October 1993 – May 1994 Student, US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Fort Bragg, NC

June 1992 – October 1993 Assistant Chief of Staff, G5 (Civil-Military Operations) 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Fort Campbell, KY

June 1979 – June 1992 Various Positions in the U.S. Army

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

- Shipley, Writing Federal Proposals
- Shipley, Managing Federal Proposals
- Training Developers Workshop
- Doctrine Developers Course
- Instructor Training Course
- FEMA, IS-00100.a Introduction to the Incident Command System
- FEMA, IS-00700.a National Incident Management System (NIMS)
- FEMA, IS-00800.b National Response Framework, An Introduction
- ACQ 101 Fundamentals of Systems Acquisition Management, October 28, 2008

MILITARY SCHOOLS:

- Regional Studies - 1994
- Civil Affairs Officer Qualification Course - 1993
- Command General Staff College - 1993
- Combined Arms Staff Service School - 1986
- Engineer Officer Advanced Course - 1984
- Jungle Operations - 1982
- Safety Officer - 1981
- Air Assault - 1981
- Ranger School - 1979
- Infantry Officer Basic Course - 1979
- Instructor Training Course - 1977
- Military Free Fall - 1975
- SERE - 1975

PROFESSIONAL, CIVIC and COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS:

- Boy Scouts of America Adult Volunteer Leader
- Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association
- Wyse Fork Historical Association

PUBLICATIONS and WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS:

- *Avoiding 'Feel Good' Civil-Military Operations* (Special Warfare, The Professional Bulletin of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, December 2005)*E-Learning & Distance Education*, presented at the March 2003, NC Healthcare Educators Summit*CASCE User Guide*, January 2003
- *Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3500.07, Joint Civil Military Operations Task Force Master Training Guide* (Principle author)
- *Joint Civil Military Operations Task Force Joint Programs of Instruction* (Principle author)
- *Special Operations Force Reference Manual* (Contributing author)
- *Special Joint Psychological Operations Task Force Joint Programs of Instruction* (Contributing author)
- *Joint Special Operations Task Force Joint Programs of Instruction* (Contributing author)
- *Special Operations Forces Education CD-ROM* (Contributing author)
- *Employment of CA (Civil Affairs) Forces: Doctrine vs. Reality* (Special Warfare, The Professional Bulletin of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, December 1996)

ONLINE COURSE DESIGN and DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS:

- 18A Special Forces Officers Course

- 18B Special Forces Weapons Sergeant Course
- 18C Special Forces Engineer Sergeant Course
- Spanish SOLT Level II Course
- Chinese Mandarin SOLT Level 1 (Modules 1-3 and part of Module 4) Course
- Tagalog SOLT Level I (Modules 1-3 and part of Module 4) Course
- Tagalog SOLT Level I (Modules 4-6) Course
- Tagalog SOLT Level II Course
- SCORM Conversion for Indonesian and Farsi
- Introduction to Performance Improvement (For SRAHEC)
- HIPAA Refresher (For SRAHEC)
- Age Specific Competency Course (For SRAHEC)
- Safety Course (For SRAHEC)
- Corporate Compliance Course (For SRAHEC)
- Blood Borne Pathogens (For SRAHEC)
- Understanding & Helping The Difficult Substance Abuse Client: A Practical Overview For Support Staff (For Duke School of Nursing)
- Identifying and Helping Persons with Developmental Disabilities and Substance Use Disorders (For Duke School of Nursing) Psychology of Addiction (For Duke School of Nursing)
- Practical PubMed (For SRAHEC)
- Introduction to Browsers (For SRAHEC)
- Guidebook for Nurses In Transition (For SRAHEC)
- 38A10 Advanced Individual Training Course (For USA John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School)
- Special Operations Force Reference Manual (For US Special Operations Command)
- Joint Civil Military Operations Task Force Joint Programs of Instruction (For US Special Operations Command)
- Joint Psychological Operations Task Force Joint Programs of Instruction (For US Special Operations Command)
- Joint Special Operations Task Force Joint Programs of Instruction (For US Special Operations Command)
- Special Operations Forces Education CD-ROM (For US Special Operations Command)