

There are primarily two types of people in most work organizations. On the one hand we have policy implementers. These are the folks who want to know what they need to do, where to do it, how to do it, and when to do it. On the other hand we have policy creators. These folks set the direction for where the organization ought to be going, declare why things are done the way they are, and craft procedures to implement the vision. In short, policy creators decide what they want policy implementers to do, how those tasks are to be completed, and the time frame by which those tasks are to be started as well as subsequently finished.

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, organizations generally had a good grasp on where policy creators and policy implementers stood. Policy creators and policy implementers based their interactions on what was learned from years of prior interactions which were all primarily in-house. Generally speaking, policy creators and policy implementers could read each other pretty well. This did not mean everything was perfect as disagreements about decisions were naturally part of the experience. However, policy implementers could mostly see what policy creators saw and vice versa. This was because policy creators had clear expectations to communicate to policy implementers. Policy implementers could ask questions and largely would get a clear answer from the policy creators. No external parties exerted one-sided explicit control over the organization at any time. It was an in-house two way street so to speak.

Policy Creators            Policy Implementers

All of this has changed in the crisis environment spurred on by COVID-19.

In this crisis landscape policy creators and policy implementers were both caught by surprise. Policy implementers responding to the crisis began to look to policy creators for a reassessment of what to do. Policy creators, having never seen or experienced this type crisis before, were forced to look outside of themselves for answers.

What is the solution to understanding the organizational framework out of the crisis?

In order to grasp the organizational behavior currently at work during the crisis, it is important for me to bring a new force into the policy creator and policy implementer relationship. I will simply call this new force the Third Entity. If policy creators represent the first entity and policy implementers represent the second entity then who makes up the Third Entity?

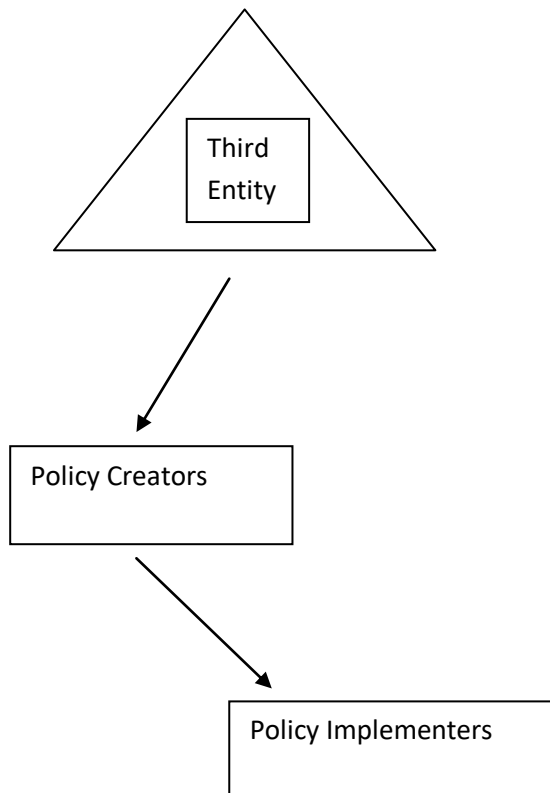
The Third Entity is made up of those parties that exert control over an organization's policy implementers and policy creators during a crisis. This is because only the Third Entity has authoritative knowledge and resources to legally compel the organization to act to abate the crisis. In a crisis of this magnitude the Third Entity will almost always be an external party to the organization. The Third Entity is introduced in the run up to the crisis, is in charge of other entities during the crisis, and terminates its role once the crisis is finished.

In the COVID-19 scenario this rightly means that guidelines set by health officials and the legal architecture created by local officials to implement those health guidelines comprises the Third Entity.

What organizational architecture may work best here to best navigate through the crisis?

At first the attempt will be to use a hierarchical platform. This scenario is easy to understand. Policy creators have the most as well as easiest access to the Third Entity. Policy implementers are not going to be the first people that the Third Entity will wish to interact with. The Third Entity will want to first reach those that set the direction for the organization.

The unfortunate reality in this dynamic is, of course, that policy implementers are no longer able to see what policy creators see. There is no longer a true two-way street in terms of information sharing. The Third Entity tells the policy creator what to do and then the policy creator tells the policy implementer how to proceed.



So, why not leave it at that? One key reason to develop a more robust organizational architecture is that the more developed the architecture the more adaptable the organization is. The more adaptable the

organization is the better chance for successful navigation through the crisis. It also pays to learn as much as one can to be better prepared for the next crisis.

So, what can policy implementers do? The power of suggestion may be their only recourse, but it is well worth a shot. Policy implementers could provide ideas that may better improve both policy creator performance, but also Third Entity performance. This may mean that a policy implementer in an organization may propose a concept that may not only benefit their organization, but also external organizations!

Policy implementers could ask the Third Entity to place logistical information on how best to execute workplace tasks during the crisis on a publicly accessible web platform. Policy implementers could ask for a Third Entity representative to be available to communicate with them on implementation concerns. Such a suggestion may spark Third Entity interest in establishing a portfolio of Third Entity representatives that communicate with policy implementers by industry type or geographic location. Policy implementers could ask for a phone hotline to reach Third Entity representatives if they have questions. Policy implementers could recommend an email list-serv for communication to come from the Third Entity. In simple terms the Third Entity may find itself having one group of people interacting with policy creators and another group of people interacting with policy implementers. The overall messaging will be the same, but the logistical approach to fine tuned solutions can be hashed out in greater detail on the policy implementation side.

This by no means eliminates the hierarchical relationship. Remember the Third Entity will exert control during the crisis no matter what. However, the framework in the preceding paragraph provides some relief to policy creators that will be interacting directly with the top echelon Third Entity staff that communicate just with policy creators. Policy creators will not have to go into exorbitant detail to answer policy implementer questions as they can point to resources that Third Entity representatives have established for policy implementers. The new setup allows policy implementers the ability to provide input that may allow for improved performance as the crisis endures.

I think a diagram works best to explain what an effective framework looks like. Here is what I came up with.

