

The Organized Anarchy Model

A final major model of the incrementalist paradigm is the organized anarchy model of public policymaking, and it is illustrated in Figure 10-6. John W. Kingdon's classic, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, is an exemplary empirical representative of this literature.¹⁵

Streams of Problems, Politics, and Policies. Basic to the model is the presence of three "streams" that flow largely independently of one another and which constitute the policymaking process.

The Problems Stream. The first of these is the *problems stream*, which involves focusing the public's and policymakers' attention on a particular social problem, defining the problem, and either applying a new public policy to the resolution of the problem or letting the problem fade from sight. Problems typically are defined in terms of *values*, such as conservative or liberal orientations; *comparisons*, such as the United States versus Iran; or *categories*—for example, is public transit for the disabled a "transportation" problem or a "civil rights" problem? Categorizing the problem becomes quite significant in how the problem is resolved.

The Political Stream. The second stream is the *political stream*. It is in the political stream that the *governmental agenda*—in other words, the list of issues or problems to be resolved—is formed. The primary participants in the formulation of the governmental agenda comprise the *visible cluster* of policy actors, or those participants who are most readily seen on the public stage. They include high-level political appointees and the president's staff; members of Congress; the media; and interest groups. A consensus is achieved by bargaining among these participants, and at some point a "bandwagon" or "tilt" effect occurs that is a consequence of an intensifying desire by the participants to be "dealt in" on the policy resolution and not to be excluded.

The Policy Stream. The third stream is the *policy stream*. It is in the policy stream that the *decision agenda*, or "alternative specification," is formulated. The decision agenda is the list of alternatives from which a public policy may be selected by policymakers to resolve a problem. Here the major forces are not political, but intellectual and

personal. Ideas and the role of the *policy entrepreneur*, or the person who holds a deep and long abiding commitment to a particular policy change, are paramount. The major participants in the formulation of the decision agenda are called the *hidden cluster* of policy actors. These include career public administrators; congressional staffers; and interest groups (interest groups, in Kingdon's analysis, are significant actors in both the visible and hidden clusters).

Phases. The policy stream moves from the formulation of a decision agenda to a "softening-up phase" in which "trial balloons" are released and a variety of suggestions are made both publicly and privately about how to resolve a particular problem. These ideas survive according to the criteria of whether they are technically feasible; whether they are acceptable to broad social values; and what future constraints—such as budgetary limitations and the prospects of political acceptance and public acquiescence—are anticipated by the actors in the policy stream. Unlike the political stream, consensus (or the "short list" of policy alternatives) is developed not by a bargaining process, but by the use of persuasion and rational argumentation among the participants in the policy stream. As in the political stream, however, a "bandwagon" or "tilt" effect occurs, and this happens when problems can be connected with alternative solutions and the solutions themselves are not perceived as being "too new" or radical.

Windows and Agendas. When these three streams—problem, politics and policy—meet, a public policy can result. Kingdon calls these convergences *windows*. Windows open when there is a shift in the national mood (usually indicated by transformative elections) or new popular perceptions. When the window opens and results in a restructuring of the *governmental agenda*, it could be solely the result of occurrences in either the problem stream or the political stream. But for a window to open that results in a restructuring of the *decision agenda* requires the joining of all three streams. In this latter case, the role of the policy entrepreneur is critical.

In many ways, the organized anarchy model is a very satisfying explanation of how public

policy is made. It teases out the process's messiness, disjointedness, humanity, and luck.

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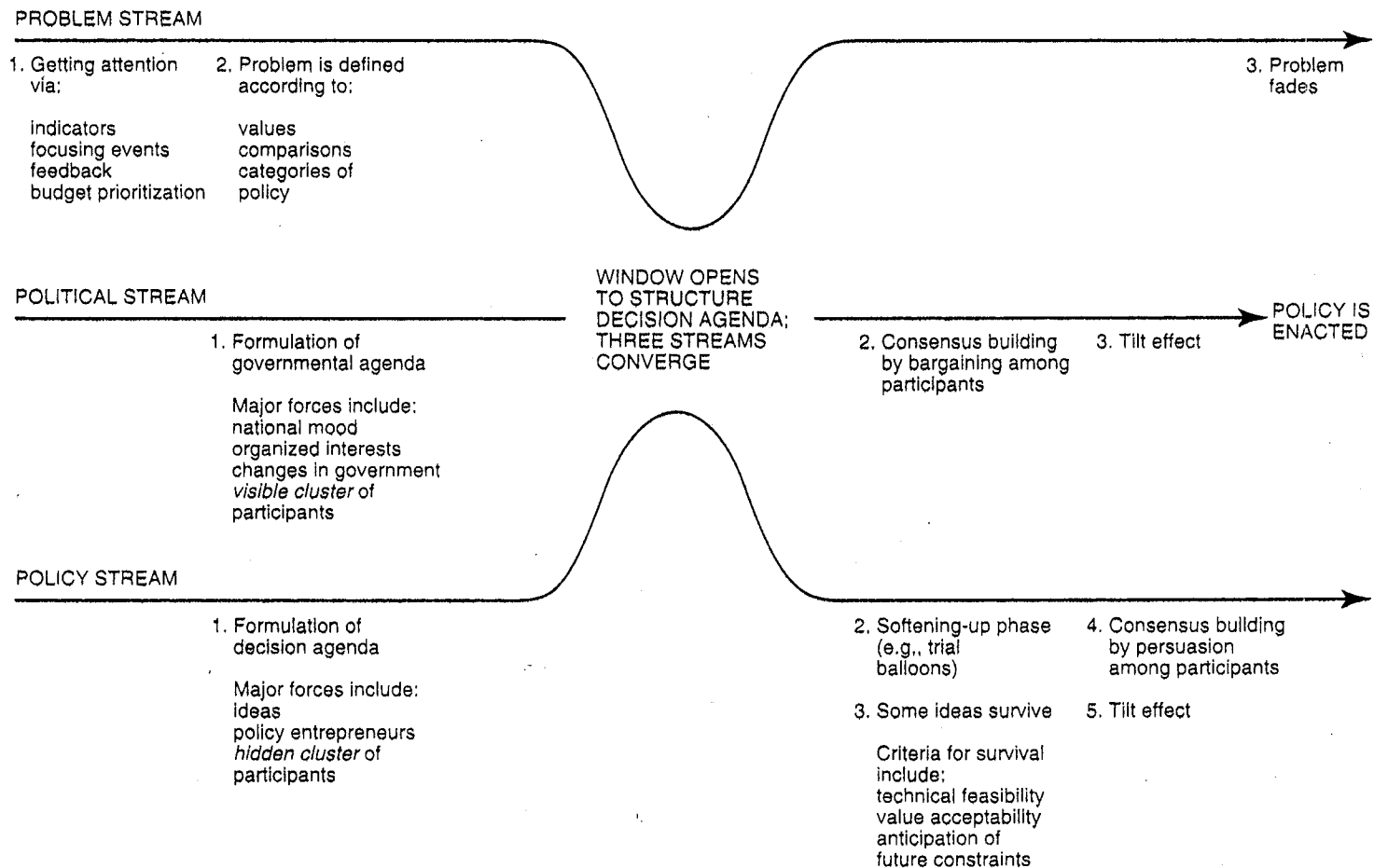


Figure 10-6 The Organized Anarchy Model of Public Policymaking and Implementation