

# Logic Analysis of Public Policy Failure under Smith Model—Taking the Central-Local Implementation Deviation of Epidemic Prevention and Control as an Example

Huilin Zhang

Department of Public Administration, College of Law, Shantou University, Shantou, China

Email: 19hlzhang1@stu.edu.cn

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## Abstract

Nowadays, the analysis of the process of public policy implementation is an extremely important issue in political science. Policy failure means that the policy cannot play its due role. It means the waste of resource input, and it also means that it will have a negative impact on society. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the nation united to wage a people's war, a general war, and a resistance war, all under the direction of the Party Central Committee. Simultaneously, as the COVID-19 pandemic is being tackled, some policies are being developed that contradict the basic policy's idea, or the policy is being implemented differently. The phenomena of "absolute zero clearing" "layer-by-layer plus code" and "one-size-fits-all" have contributed to the policy's failure and prevented it from having the desired impact. Therefore, it is particularly important to study why the epidemic prevention and control policy will fail. Based on Smith's policy implementation model, this paper comprehensively analyzes the reasons for the failure of the new coronavirus prevention and control policy from four influencing factors: idealized policy, implementing agency, target group and implementation environment, and puts forward corresponding solutions and optimization paths, in order to provide reference for China's public policy research and policy practice.

## Keywords

Smith Model, Policy Implementation, Policy Implementation Deviation, Public Policy, Public Policy Failure

## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 epidemic is an unprecedented major public health emergency of international concern and global common concern. The unexpected COVID-19 epidemic in 2020 is a severe test of the national governance system and a test of the effectiveness of public policy formulation and implementation. The three-year anti-epidemic achievements are inseparable from the important research and judgment of the CPC Central Committee on the epidemic situation, major decision-making and deployment of prevention and control work, and prevention and control strategies. However, in the process of epidemic prevention and control, there have also been problems. It is necessary to sum up the experience in a timely manner in conjunction with the local implementation of the central public policy process, and strengthen the national comprehensive governance capacity through positive and effective changes. In the process of local governments implementing the epidemic prevention and control policies promulgated by the central government, due to the asymmetry of information, the lack of professionalism, the lack of implementation conditions and the influence of implementation preferences, there are different degrees of public implementation deviations, resulting in the failure of public policies. The research question of this paper is: why do some places fail in policy implementation when implementing central policies? What is the failure logic behind it?

Based on the analysis perspective of Smith's policy model, this study will take the central-local implementation deviation of epidemic prevention and control as an example, and comprehensively analyze the logic of public policy failure from the multi-dimensional perspectives of idealized policies, implementing agencies, target groups and environmental factors. This can not only consolidate the hard-won epidemic prevention and control achievements, but also help to improve the ability of the party and the country to prevent and resolve major risks.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Model

### 2.1. Literature Review

Public policy failure is a difficult problem in public policy practice, and effectively dealing with the problem of public policy failure is a prerequisite for improving the scientific level of public policy (Henderson, 2013). Pressman, J. L. and Wildavsky, A's "implementation" in 1973 analyzed how Washington's policy failed in Oakland (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). In 1986, Yehezkel. K put forward the view of policy-making incompetence in the article "Policy-making in adversity" by studying the policy-making practice of western developed countries (Dror, 1986). Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson proposed in 2012 that inclusive institutions and extractive institutions are the key factors determining the success of a country's economic policy (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Compared with the West, China's research on policy failure started late. For China, the study of public policy failure is a new field of policy analysis.

Studying the causes of public policy failure is mainly to explore the internal logic of policy failure. The academic analysis of the reasons for the failure of public policy is multifaceted and multi-level. Some are from the perspective of comprehensive factors, and some are from the specific perspective of policy subject, system and policy process. Secondly, most of the academic research on public policy failure cases focuses on economy, education, science and technology and environment. The typical examples of policy failure in the economic field are mainly concentrated in the fields of real estate, industry and energy. The failure of policies in education and science and technology is closely related to the short-term behavior in policy agenda setting. The term of office of local government officials is limited. In order to improve their performance in the short term, they will ignore areas such as education, science and technology that are heavily invested and slow to achieve results. Therefore, there will be some policy failures in the stage of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. With the deepening of policy implementation research, researchers regard policy implementation as a complex dynamic process. Due to various factors in reality, many idealized policies often fail to achieve the expected results in the implementation process, and there will be a phenomenon that the policy effect deviates from the policy objectives. This phenomenon is called “policy implementation bias” (Whitford, 2007). How to avoid the deviation of policy implementation and ensure that the effect of policy implementation does not deviate from the policy objectives has always been a difficult problem for the academic community and the government.

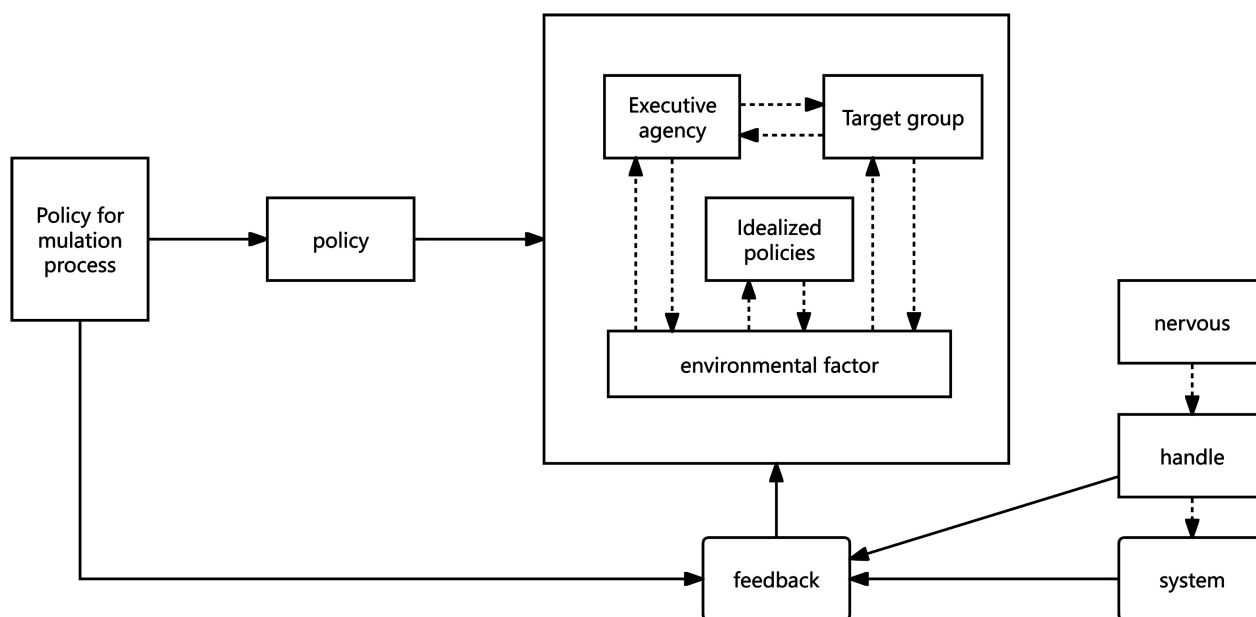
In summary, the existing literature shows the research results of current domestic and foreign scholars in the fields of public policy failure and policy implementation deviation, which not only lays a solid theoretical foundation for this study, but also exposes the deficiencies in the existing research. First of all, when combing the literature and research results of foreign scholars, it can be found that Western scholars provide a research perspective and theoretical framework for China’s research policy implementation process, but different countries have different national conditions. The conclusions drawn by Western scholars are not fully applicable to the policy failure problem in the Chinese context. Therefore, domestic scholars began to explore the localized policy implementation framework according to the specific situation of Chinese society. In recent years, the number of researches on policy implementation deviation is increasing year by year, and there are many macro theoretical analysis, but the optimization measures are more general. In view of specific public health emergencies, such as the novel coronavirus pneumonia epidemic, the policy failure caused by the deviation of the implementation process of the policy needs to be further studied.

## **2.2. Theoretical Model**

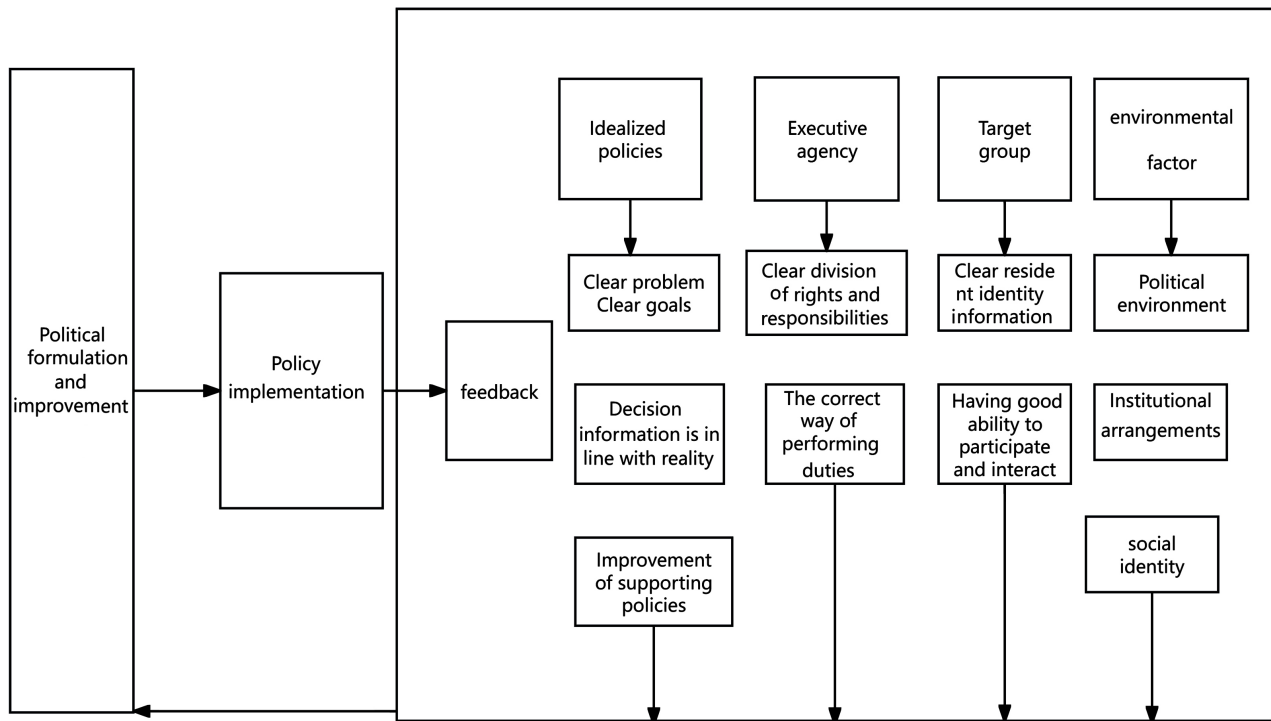
This study is based on Smith’s policy implementation model to explore the reasons for the failure of epidemic prevention and control policies. T. B. Smith, an

American policy scholar, systematically sorted out and summarized the main factors affecting the success or failure of policy implementation, and established a complete analytical framework accordingly. He believes that there are many factors that affect the implementation of policies, but there are four main factors, which are: idealized policies, implementing agencies, target groups, and environmental factors. Specifically, the idealized policy is an idealized mode of action that the upper-level decision-makers try to formulate and guide to solve social problems, including policy makers, the form and scope of policy implementation; implementing agencies usually refer to government agencies and their units responsible for policy implementation, mainly including the implementation capacity and implementation methods of the responsible departments; the target population refers to the target group to be implemented by the policy. It is necessary to know the characteristics of these objects and their recognition and support for the policy as the direct audience of the policy; environmental factors mainly refer to those factors that affect policy implementation in the environment. The specific contents are: political system, economic foundation, social culture, social thought, historical habits and other environmental characteristics and their main characteristics. These factors will have a direct impact on the effect of policy implementation. In the Smith's model, as shown in **Figure 1**, these four factors influence each other, work together in the whole process of policy implementation, and influence the effect of policy implementation under the action of feedback (Smith, 1973).

Therefore, based on Smith's policy implementation process model, the research constructs a new coronavirus epidemic prevention and control policy implementation process model in **Figure 2**. In this scenario, four factors can be concretized as: idealized epidemic prevention and control policies, that is, the



**Figure 1.** The Smith's model of the policy implementation.



**Figure 2.** The implementation process model of COVID-19 prevention and control policy based on Smith's policy implementation theory model.

policies formulated should be idealized, operational, scientific and universally applicable. That is to say, the epidemic prevention and control policy should have clear policy objectives, in line with the actual situation and the corresponding supporting facilities should also be improved; implementing agencies, relevant departments should have clear responsibilities and division of labor, and adopt appropriate and reasonable ways to perform their duties; the target group, that is, the broad masses of the people, is the object of the epidemic prevention and control policy, and must have the ability to actively cooperate with the implementation of the epidemic prevention and control policy; environmental factors, that is to say, to create a good political environment, appropriate and reasonable institutional arrangements and certain social identity, impose environmental factors on the implementation of epidemic prevention and control policies. If the relationship between these four elements is too tense or uncoordinated, it will affect the efficiency of policy implementation, resulting in deviations in policy objectives.

### 3. Logical Analysis of Local Epidemic Prevention Policy Failure

The failure of public policy is caused by the mutual influence and comprehensive game between various factors. The research analyzes the four factors of idealized policy, executing agency, target group and environmental factor. In the process of mutual influence of these factors, the society will have a certain ten-

sion, which will lead to conflicts between policy implementers and policy audiences, thus forming a tense policy relationship (Dror, 1968).

### 3.1. Idealized Policy

In Smith's policy implementation framework, "idealized policy" is regarded as the primary factor affecting policy implementation, which includes the social background, rationality and feasibility of policy formulation (Smith, 1973). Because policy makers and policy implementers are not the same person, it is difficult to fully grasp the policy environment, which will inevitably lead to the inconsistency between idealized policies and reality. The effective implementation of prevention and control policies must meet several prerequisites, namely: the problem is perceived by policy makers and accurately grasp the face of the problem, the local government can fully grasp the intention of policy formulation according to the macro policies given by the central government, the local government can truthfully feedback and report the effect of policy implementation, and the supporting policies are comprehensive. If the design and implementation of public policies do not meet these preconditions, it will be difficult to achieve the desired policy. There are two reasons for the deviation in the implementation of local epidemic prevention policies. First, the policy is not standardized and rigorous. One of the prerequisites for idealized policies is that the policy itself should be standardized and rigorous. If it is not standardized, rigorous and realistic, then its own shortcomings will leave loopholes for law enforcers and provide relevant policy implementers with a reason to eliminate "implementation risks". Second, the policy supporting measures are not in place. China's major epidemic prevention and control laws and regulations have shortcomings such as shortage and lag, and the current legal system also has problems such as different and contradictory provisions. In addition, most of the emergency plans and epidemic prevention measures issued by local governments during the epidemic period have poor connection and weak system, especially the provisions on emergency response and emergency requisition of epidemic prevention facilities and materials are not clear.

### 3.2. Executive Agency

Smith believes that the structure and personnel of the executive organs, the management methods and skills of leaders, the ability and confidence of policy implementation are the key factors that affect the effectiveness of public policy implementation (Smith, 1973). The effective implementation of public policy is inseparable from a sound and good organization and high-level executives, otherwise it is difficult to achieve the desired policy results. As a key factor in the effectiveness of public policy implementation, the main factors causing the failure of public policy are the formalism and bureaucracy of the executive body, the incorrect way of performing duties, the weak awareness of the rule of law and the lack of understanding or deliberate misinterpretation of the policy. The

executing agencies have shown a superficial and formal trend in the methods and means of implementing epidemic prevention and control policies, which directly leads to policy failure. The outbreak of the epidemic is sudden and uncertain. Local governments need to undertake the prevention and control tasks issued by the central government in a short period of time, which are large and heavy. Therefore, local governments may adopt strategies such as concealing information, blurring causality, shifting their attention or finding scapegoats to avoid responsibility. At the same time, in the prevention and control of the epidemic, the central government has given local governments certain discretion, allowing local governments to formulate epidemic prevention policies in line with local conditions according to local conditions. This will also lead to the abuse of discretion by local implementers to a certain extent, because the drive of interests is to attach the so-called “land policy” to the original policy, which leads to “there are policies on the ground and countermeasures on the ground”, which seriously affects the effective implementation of the policy. The implementers’ one-size-fits-all, simple and crude policy implementation methods and management models even violate the spirit of the rule of law, ignore the constraints of the law, and overuse public power.

### **3.3. Target Group**

Smith believes that the willingness of target groups to accept public policies, the degree of understanding and recognition of policies, and the complexity and diversity of their own behaviors are all important factors that need to be considered in the process of policy implementation (Smith, 1973). Whether the policy can achieve the desired effect depends not only on the attitude of policy makers, but also on the attitude of policy recipients. The effective implementation of epidemic prevention and control policies requires the active cooperation and participation of citizens everywhere. At the beginning of epidemic prevention and control, citizens know the law or commit illegal acts due to lack of legal awareness. For example, some people use QQ, WeChat, Weibo and other social media as well as websites and forums to deliberately create rumors and panics about the COVID-19 epidemic, causing great panic; individual confirmed COVID-19 patients, suspected patients, asymptomatic infected persons and close contacts have intentionally or unintentionally caused the spread of the virus by concealing and falsely reporting real personal data; a few people abused, intimidated, beaten medical staff, and hindered epidemic prevention personnel from implementing relevant prevention and prevention work; some people refuse to obey the legal orders of government agencies, or forcibly break into the police cordon and checkpoints; some companies and individuals have taken advantage of the epidemic to hoard drugs or vegetables, bid up prices and make huge profits, causing great damage to the market order. Residents’ lack of legal awareness and self-management awareness is a bottleneck that has not been overcome in the implementation of local epidemic prevention policies for a long time, thus affecting the effective implementation of policies.

### 3.4. Environmental Factor

The environmental factors in Smith's policy implementation process model mainly include various factors affecting policy implementation in political, economic, cultural and educational environments (Smith, 1973). Whether the policy can achieve the desired effect depends not only on the attitude of. The environment is an interactive system composed of multiple factors. The environmental factors affecting the implementation of epidemic prevention and control policies involve many aspects, including the political environment, the bureaucratic division of labor at the institutional level, the division of powers and responsibilities, and the social identity at the citizen level, which will exert a subtle and continuous influence in the process of policy implementation. The implementation process of public policy will be affected and restricted by the environment to a certain extent. Positive political culture and good public opinion atmosphere create a favorable growth environment for the policy and promote the implementation of the policy. Otherwise, policy implementation will encounter obstacles, mainly reflected in: the first economic foundation determines the superstructure, politics is the concentrated expression of the economy. The economic situation has a great influence on the implementation of the policy. During the epidemic, the economy was depressed, and everyone was unemployed at home and had no economic income. Some citizens with mortgages, car loans, etc., due to high economic pressure and low psychological affordability, will be more resentful and dissatisfied with the current epidemic policy. The adverse economic environment during the epidemic period is not conducive to the implementation of epidemic prevention and control policies and affects the effectiveness of policy implementation.

### 3.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter analyzes the reasons for the failure of epidemic prevention and control policies through the four influencing factors of Smith's policy implementation process model. Through the logical analysis of the failure of the epidemic prevention and control policy, it is found that the main reason for the failure of the policy lies in the limitations of the policy itself, such as the policy itself is not rigorous and the normative and supporting policies are not in place; the implementation deviation of the executive subject, the incorrect way of performing duties and the weak awareness of the rule of law, the lack of understanding or deliberate misinterpretation of the policy; the target group lacks the rule of law thinking and spirit, the participation consciousness is weak and the independent ability is not high; the lack of resources in the policy environment and the impact of unreasonable systems. Based on the above reasons, the following will propose solutions and optimization paths.

## 4. Suggestions for Improvement

Policy implementation is affected by internal and external variables of the policy,

and any variable will affect the implementation effect of the epidemic prevention and control policy (Anderson, 1984). In order to effectively implement the epidemic prevention policy, we must consider the idealized policy, implementing agencies, target groups and policy environment, take corresponding actions to make the interaction between these four elements from tension to coordination and order, eliminate the obstacles that hinder the implementation of the epidemic prevention and control policy, and make the policy effectively implemented (Strother, 2018).

#### **4.1. Strengthen the Top-Level Design of Policies and Improve Supporting Policies**

In order to effectively implement the COVID-19 prevention and control policy, the most important thing is to ensure the scientificity of the central and local COVID-19 prevention and control policy system and the rationality and feasibility of the policy itself. The perfect legal and regulatory system and epidemic prevention policy can provide institutional guarantee for the sustainable operation of winning the battle against the epidemic. At the same time, it is necessary to formulate corresponding supporting policies, pay attention to the connection between policies, and create favorable conditions for the implementation of policies (Hudson, 2005). When formulating policy plans, local governments should understand the spiritual essence of the central policy, have a clear understanding of the position of the government at the same level and the tasks to be undertaken, and do a good job in supporting the policy level. The policy system is an organic whole, which is formed by the interaction and mutual restriction of various policies. When formulating policy plans, policy makers should comprehensively consider the problems, carefully analyze the functions and implementation conditions of the policy, and pay attention to the mutual cooperation between different functional policies, so as to avoid the ineffectiveness of the policy due to the lack of implementation conditions and supporting policies.

#### **4.2. Strengthen the Ability of Local Policy Implementation and Strengthen the Effective Supervision of the Executive Body**

The personal quality and professional level of local policy implementers affect the implementation effect of epidemic prevention and control policies (Butler & Allen, 2008). First of all, strengthen the training of local grassroots cadres' rule of law learning, improve their rule of law literacy, and promote the implementation of law-based thinking and rule of law to carry out epidemic prevention and control work, so that law enforcement and civilized law enforcement. Secondly, through ideological education, professional training and multiple supervision, the concept of implementing epidemic prevention policy personnel is constantly updated, their professional quality, professional ethics and policy implementation level are improved, so that they can correctly understand the essence of the policy, prevent the policy from being distorted, and make the policy "deformed" in implementation. Furthermore, establish a reasonable performance appraisal

mechanism. On the one hand, through the development of performance appraisal to improve the enthusiasm of cadres' policy implementation, on the other hand, we must also grasp the degree of assessment requirements, and avoid the emergence of cadres in order to improve performance in the short term because of the pressure of assessment. Take a "one size fits all" and "level plus code" approach to achieve the goal. Based on laws and regulations, the systematization and standardization of performance appraisal are realized, and the power and responsibility relationship and specific division of labor between horizontal departments and vertical superiors and subordinates are clarified. Finally, it is necessary to continuously track and evaluate the implementation of local epidemic prevention and control policies in a timely manner, and strengthen the supervision of the implementation subjects, so as to facilitate the timely correction of policy implementation deviations and "aliasing" phenomena and prevent policy failure.

### **4.3. Expand the Participation of Target Groups and Enhance the Policy Identity of Target Groups**

The local people are the target population of the epidemic prevention and control policy and the most direct stakeholders. When implementing the policy, it is the key to prevent the failure of the epidemic prevention and control policy to enhance the recognition and support of the local people for the epidemic prevention policy and to make the target population feel safe in the policy (Ren, 2020). In the process of implementing the epidemic prevention and control policy, the effect of policy implementation depends on whether the target group can transform policy identity into conscious action. Therefore, in order to expand the participation of the target group, it is necessary to make the epidemic prevention policy fully reflect public opinion. The local government should understand the ideas and opinions of local residents and unblock the channels for the expression of mass appeals; at the same time, we should innovate the means of policy publicity, popularize the objectives and significance of the policy, and publicize the specific measures to implement the policy, so as to enable the executors to have a correct understanding of the policy and implement it, and promote the target groups to consciously accept the policy, so as to promote the better implementation of the policy and prevent the failure of the policy.

### **4.4. Create a Good Policy Implementation Environment**

First of all, the economic base determines the superstructure. In order to better implement the epidemic prevention and control policies, it is necessary to protect the basic economic conditions of the people, strengthen the protection of the people's living materials, and do a good job in ensuring the prices of important people's livelihood commodities, such as vegetables and fruits during the control period, epidemic prevention materials and drugs, etc., to ensure the normal operation of the society and basic medical services, to maintain the normal production and working order of the people, and to solve the problems

raised by the masses in a timely manner, so that the basic living needs of the residents during the disposal of the epidemic are met. Secondly, it is necessary to sort out the relationship between power and responsibility and clarify their respective responsibilities and tasks. In terms of the division of power and responsibility, there are problems such as the asymmetry of power between the upper and lower levels of government, the “offside” problem caused by too many levels, and the “absence” phenomenon caused by overlapping functions (Deng & Xu, 2012). The separation of power and responsibility may lead to the breeding of formalism and bureaucracy, and the responsibility will weaken the management efficiency. Therefore, it is necessary to establish the boundary of responsibilities between the central and local governments at the vertical level and between local governments and departments at the horizontal level, and establish a clear and clear list of responsibilities in accordance with the principle of “power is responsibility” and “power and responsibility are equal”, so as to avoid the transfer of responsibilities from superiors to subordinates by order, and avoid the transfer of responsibilities from departments to subordinates on the grounds of territorial management.

## 5. Conclusion

The epidemic prevention and control of COVID-19 is a general war and a protracted war. The epidemic prevention and control policy should adhere to the concept of people first and life first, and resolutely oppose “lying flat” and excessive epidemic prevention. With the continuous development of practice in various places, we should summarize the experience of dealing with major health incidents, timely correct the implementation deviation of the epidemic prevention and control policy in the implementation process, and scientifically and reasonably respond to the development and changes of the epidemic to prevent the policy from failing. The full liberalization of China’s epidemic prevention and control represents that China has created a miracle for a populous country in the history of human civilization to get out of the pandemic. The China Program shows China’s wisdom and China’s efficiency. The central government’s strategies and measures for epidemic prevention and control have proved to be completely correct in practice, but we still cannot ignore the policy failure in the process of local implementation of epidemic prevention in the fight against the epidemic. We must learn from experience and lessons, summarize measures, improve the policy system to deal with major national health incidents, and promote the effect of policy implementation to achieve policy expectations.

The research attempts to use the Smith model as the theoretical analysis framework to study the reasons for the failure of the new coronavirus epidemic prevention and control policy in some places. From the four influencing factors of idealized policy, executing agency, target group and execution environment, the reasons for the failure of the new coronavirus epidemic prevention and control policy are comprehensively analyzed, and corresponding solutions and op-

timization paths are proposed according to the four influencing factors. The research not only enriches the application of Smith's policy implementation model theory in practice, but also expands a new research field for the field of major health event governance in China. At the same time, it also provides a new case for the analysis and solution of the failure of public policy or the deviation of local policy implementation, and explores some new contents to promote the effective implementation of public policy.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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