

# **Explaining job satisfaction of public professionals: Policy alienation and politicking in organizations**

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## **Abstract**

This paper contributes in two ways to our understanding of the pressures public professionals face in service delivery. First, it theoretically analyses the influence of policy pressures (measured using the policy alienation framework) and politicking pressures on job satisfaction, thereby combining the literature streams of policy implementation and organizational politics. Second, we use a large-scale survey of 1,317 Dutch healthcare professionals to examine the effects of these pressures on job satisfaction. A large-scale quantitative approach can provide new insights to the debate on pressured professionals. The results show that both politicking pressures and the policy alienation dimension powerlessness (perceived lack of influence and autonomy during policy implementation) affect the job satisfaction of public professionals. Further, they interact, the negative effect of powerlessness on job satisfaction is strongest among professionals working in a highly politicized environment. In other words, influence during policy implementation is especially relevant when professionals experience highly politicized environments.

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# 1 Introduction

In 2008, the Dutch government introduced the Health Insurance Law. This was part of a process to convert the healthcare system into one based on a regulated market (Helderman et al., 2005; Smullen, forthcoming 2011). In the Health Insurance Law, a system of Diagnosis Related Groups (DRGs) was developed as a means of determining the level of financial exchange for mental healthcare provision. This DRG-policy differs significantly from the former method, in which each medical action resulted in a financial claim, i.e., the more sessions that a mental healthcare professional had with a patient, the more recompense that could be claimed. This former system was considered by some to be inefficient (Helderman et al., 2005; Kimberly et al., 2009). The DRG-policy changed the situation by stipulating a *standard* rate for each disorder. This was a significant change, which was not welcomed by many professionals. In one large-scale survey, about 90 per cent of the professionals wanted this policy to be abandoned and some openly demonstrated against it (Palm et al., 2008). Further, the DRG-policy negatively influenced the work attitudes and behaviors of public professionals. The following two quotations by professionals are illustrative<sup>1</sup>:

“As a result of the DRG-policy, I decided to quit my job as a psychiatrist.”

“Working with clients provides me with satisfaction, I find that fascinating! The DRG-policy doesn't give me job satisfaction at all. [...] I am a fierce objector of the DRG-policy”

Next to the introduction of new policies like DRGs, these professionals also have to deal with other pressures, such as those coming from the internal political games in their organizations. Managers in public service organizations are forced to introduce ‘planning and control-systems’, benchmarking and monitoring systems (Noordegraaf, 2006:182). This can contradict the professional basis for service provision and increases organizational political behaviour, which may negatively influence the attitudes and behaviours of professionals. The following quote shows how a mental healthcare professional experiences increased political behaviour in his organization, resulting from dividing the tasks of managers and professionals:

“Management - without knowledge of healthcare contents - and healthcare professionals - characterized by management as people who have no understanding of leadership, money and organization - are split up in my organization. This division resulted in endless bureaucracy and in inefficient systems.”

In this article, our main aim is to examine the effects of these policy pressures (such as implementing the DRG-policy) and of politicking pressures (such as increased manager-professional conflict) on the job satisfaction of public professionals. While doing this, we also examine in which ways policy and politicking pressures interact. That is, in which ways do these pressures reinforce each other? For instance, do policy pressures influence job satisfaction more when professionals experience a highly politicized environment?

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations are drawn from open answers from the survey described in this paper.

This study aims to contribute in two ways to the debate in public administration on the pressures public professionals nowadays face (Ackroyd et al., 2007; De Ruyter et al., 2008; Duyvendak et al., 2006; Evetts, 2003; Freidson, 2001; Noordegraaf & Schinkel, 2011; Thomas & Davies, 2005). First, we will combine insights from policy implementation literature and organizational politics literature to more fully explain the pressures professionals face. On the one hand, policy implementation scholars examine how front-line professionals experience the implementation of governmental policies (Elmore, 1985; May & Winter, 2009; Riccucci, 2005), while on the other hand organization scholars look at the way organizational politics influence a number of work outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Buchanan, 2008; Ferris et al., 1996; Ferris et al., 2002). The literature streams of policy implementation and organizational politics are not well-connected. However, policy implementation happens in and around organizations, which can be characterized as political systems (Mayes & Allen, 1977; Mintzberg, 1983; Morgan, 2006; Pfeffer, 1981). During policy implementation, the organizational political environment in organizations – such as that you need the support of certain informal leaders - can be highly relevant. Hence, combining these literature streams by examining the interconnectedness between policy and politicking pressures could increase our understanding of the pressures professionals nowadays face.

The second contribution is that we will analyze the pressures and their influence on job satisfaction using a quantitative approach. The majority of studies examining the pressures of public professionals in service delivery rely on qualitative research (for example Ackroyd et al., 2007; De Ruyter et al., 2008; Thomas & Davies, 2005). The strength of this qualitative research is that it captures the plethora of reasons for increasingly problematic public professional employment such as the quality of line management and intensified work load. Quantitative research can help in theory testing and statistical generalization. A quantitative approach can test existing relationships and thereby provide new insights to the debate concerning the experiences of public professionals at the 'front-line'.

This brings us to the outline of the paper. In the following section we will discuss the theoretical framework, considering the influence of policy and politicking pressures on job satisfaction. Second, we use a large scale survey of 1,317 Dutch healthcare professionals to test the proposed explanatory framework. The empirical results – including hypothesis testing - are discussed. We conclude by discussing the contribution of this paper to the debate in public administration on the pressures public professionals nowadays face.

## 2 Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Background: Professionals and pressures

Professionals and professionalism are important concepts in the public sector. In the first studies on professionals and professionalism, a functionalist perspective was used, originating from the works of Emile Durkheim (1957). In this perspective, professionals are seen as the bearers of important social values. Professionals, such as medical specialists and notaries are said to use their skills for the betterment of society. Especially in the 1970s and 1980s, professionals and professionalism have become much more controversial. It was said that professionals were too much occupied with their self-interest, which resulted in for instance empire-building and protecting their professional status (Duyvendak et al., 2006). One prime example of this assault is Illich's 'Medical Nemesis. The Expropriation of Health'. Illich (1976:3) argues that the power of the medical profession is harmful to society: 'The medical establishment has become a major threat to health. The disabling impact of professional control over medicine has reached the proportions of an epidemic.'

However, in the present day the balance seems to be shifting once again. For instance, Freidson – once a leading critic on the power of professions - argues that this power of professions is diminishing to a state that it can have serious negative consequences for both professionals and society (2001). Numerous forces nowadays contradict the ideals of professionalism, such as changes in the way professionals are managed, the emancipation of clients and changing political viewpoints (Ackroyd et al., 2007; De Ruyter et al., 2008; Exworthy & Halford, 1998). For instance, some note that as a result of managerial pressures, professions experience a reduction in their autonomy and dominance (Evetts, 2003:369; Exworthy & Halford, 1998). Further, Conley (2002:728), examining the influence of New Public Management (NPM) restructuring in the UK, argues that "one result of continued pressure is that public services workers are 'voting with their feet' [that is, leaving public organizations]". Next, as a result of managerial pressures and emancipated clients, professions such as medicine face deprofessionalization (Harrison & Ahmad, 2000). However, these very same developments increase the demands for professionalization of other groups, such as social work and nursing, where clients and politicians urge for evidence-based practice and a high education of workers (Noordegraaf, 2007). Finally, based on a qualitative case study, Brunetto and Farr-Wharton (2004) argue that introducing managerial pressures like NPM can negatively influence both autonomy and job satisfaction of nurses.

The discussion shows the different ways in which professionals and professionalism are considered throughout the years, and the variety of pressures professionals nowadays face. In this paper, we will look specifically at the way policy and politicking pressures influence the job satisfaction of professionals. Policy pressures are increasingly important in the public sphere, most notably as a result of the introduction of NPM-like policies, which focus on business values such as efficiency and financial transparency (De Ruyter et al., 2008; Duyvendak et al., 2006; Thomas & Davies, 2005). Further, politicking pressures are perceived to be dominant in the public sector, with its ambiguous goals, scarce resources and (groups of) employees having different, often conflicting, values, norms and interests

(Miles, 1980; Pfeffer, 1981; Rainey, 2003). We chose for a focus on job satisfaction as it is an important work outcome and a strong predictor of work behaviours, such as organizational citizenship (Organ & Greene, 1981) and turnover (Saari & Judge, 2004).

## 2.2 Using policy alienation framework to assess policy pressures

The policy pressures professionals face are examined using the policy alienation concept. Policy alienation is defined as a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the policy programme being implemented, in this instance by a public professional who regularly interacts directly with clients (Tummers et al., 2009). We use the policy alienation framework for two reasons. First, it is a coherent theoretical framework for understanding the attitudes of public professionals towards policies. Indeed, although some prominent policy implementation scholars have emphasized the crucial role of identifying with a new policy (Ewalt & Jennings, 2004; May & Winter, 2009), few have developed and tested a framework for analyzing this topic (O'Toole, 2000). Second, policy alienation it is one of the few concepts used in the debate on the pressures of professionals that has been quantified using a psychometrically sound approach (DeVellis, 2003; Tummers, 2009). As such, it is well-matched to our goal of quantitatively examining factors that influence the job satisfaction of public professionals.

Policy alienation is multidimensional, consisting of powerlessness and meaningfulness dimensions (for a more elaborate explanation, see Tummers, forthcoming 2011). In essence, powerlessness is a person's lack of control over events in their life. Meaninglessness, on the other hand, is the inability to comprehend the relationship of one's contribution with a larger purpose. Professionals can feel powerless while implementing a policy, for example if they have no influence over the sort, quantity and quality of sanctions and rewards they issue (Lipsky, 1980). Further, it is also evident that professionals can feel that implementing a policy is meaningless, if, for example, it does not deliver any apparent beneficial outcomes for society (Van Thiel & Leeuw, 2002). To make the dimensions more specific to the situation being studied, we distinguish between strategic, tactical and operational powerlessness, and between societal and client meaningfulness. The definitions of these dimensions are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Operationalization of policy alienation: Five dimensions**

Dimension	Definition	An example situation leading to a high score
Strategic powerlessness	The perceived influence of the professionals on decisions concerning the content of the policy, as is captured in rules and regulations.	A professional feeling that the policy is drafted without the help of implementing professionals or professional associations.
Tactical powerlessness	The professionals' perceived influence on decisions concerning the way policy is implemented within their own organisation.	Professionals stating that organizational managers did not consult them or their colleagues when designing the implementation process for the policy.
Operational powerlessness	The perceived degree of freedom in making choices concerning the sort, quantity and quality of sanctions and rewards on offer when implementing the policy.	Answering 'fully agree' to a survey question on whether the professional feels that their autonomy during the implementation process was lower than it should be.
Societal meaningfulness	The perception of professionals concerning the added value of the policy to socially relevant goals.	Stating in an interview that 'I agree with the policy goal of enhancing transparency, but I do not see how this policy helps in achieving this goal.'
Client meaningfulness	The professionals' perceptions of the added value of their implementing a policy for their own clients	A professional noting that a particular policy seriously impinges on their clients' privacy.

### 2.3 The influence of the policy alienation dimensions on job satisfaction

Having examined the policy alienation concept, we can now examine the expected relationship between the policy alienation dimensions and job satisfaction, starting with the powerlessness dimensions.

The mechanism which relates power to job satisfaction can be traced back to the human relations movement (McGregor, 1960). One of the central tenets of this movement is that employees have a right to have input into decisions that affect their lives. Employees enjoy carrying out the decisions they have helped creating themselves. Also, employees can reach recognition when they are granted the opportunity to make decisions themselves. This recognition is known to motivate and satisfy employees. In so, the human relations movement predicts that when employees experience influence during implementation (here: policy implementation), this increases their job satisfaction, by fulfilling intrinsic employee needs (Wagner III, 1994).

We can apply these findings in relating the powerlessness dimensions to job satisfaction (see also S. M. Bacharach & Aiken, 1979). Looking at strategic powerlessness, we would expect that the more public professionals – as a professional group – experience an influence in the drafting of a policy, the more they will be satisfied with their job. Here, the individual public professionals do not have to experience this influence directly, they can sense an influence if others, such as their professional associations, appear to have fruitfully represented them in the debate. This can lead to an increase in their job satisfaction. As such, this dimension often concerns indirect, rather than direct, power, which may positively influence job satisfaction (Cotton et al., 1988).

Next, we examine the relationship between tactical powerlessness and job satisfaction. It is commonly accepted that participation in decision making is a method which can increase employee job satisfaction, as it provides employees with a sense of control and

co-ownership. After conducting a meta-analytic literature review, Miller and Monge (1986:748) concluded that 'participation has an effect on both satisfaction and productivity, and its effect on satisfaction is somewhat stronger than its effect on productivity'. Based on this, we expect that the more professionals experience that they can influence the way the policy is implemented within their organization (high tactical powerlessness), the more they will be satisfied with their job.

Finally, more operational powerlessness – or less discretion - is expected to be negatively related to job satisfaction. In the policy implementation literature, it is suggested that an important factor in the attitudes of street-level public servants is the extent to which organizations delegate decision-making authority to the frontline (Meier & O'Toole, 2002). This influence may be particularly pronounced in professionals whose expectations of discretion and autonomy contradict notions of bureaucratic control (DeHart-Davis & Pandey, 2005; Evetts, 2003; Freidson, 2001). Thus, we propose:

H1: Strategic powerlessness will negatively influence job satisfaction.

H2: Tactical powerlessness will negatively influence job satisfaction.

H3: Operational powerlessness will negatively influence job satisfaction.

Examining the influence of meaninglessness on job satisfaction, we note that many organizational scholars have indicated that meaningless work decreases job satisfaction. Hackman & Oldham (1976), using their Job Diagnostic Model, argue that one of the three critical states for positive personal and work outcomes (such as motivation and satisfaction) is experienced meaningfulness of work. Further, Shepard (1969) reported 'significant negative correlations [...] between job satisfaction and perceived meaninglessness in work ( $r = -.47$ ).'

We can apply this to the meaninglessness experienced when implementing a new policy. First, we would expect that when professionals perceive that a policy has no value for society, they will be less satisfied with their job. In this case, professionals are sensing that a policy programme is not actually dealing with the provision of desirable public services, such as financial protection and security. As a result, they might wonder why they have to implement such a policy. In a sense, a part of their work can therefore be qualified as meaningless, which can negatively influence their job satisfaction. This may be particularly important for professionals working in the public sector, as they generally possess some motivation to work for the public good, known as Public Service Motivation (Houston, 2000; Perry, 1996).

Second, greater client meaninglessness is also expected to negatively influence job satisfaction. May and Winter (2009) found that if frontline workers perceive the instruments they have at their disposal for implementing a policy as ineffective, in terms of delivering to their clients, this is likely to add to their frustrations. They do not see how their implementation of the policy helps their clients, and this may decrease their job satisfaction. Given that the evaluation of effectiveness is likely to be based on on-the-job experience, rooted in the circumstances that professionals encounter in doing their job, this aspect of

attitude is likely to be particularly important when it comes to determining attitudes and behaviours (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2003).

In sum, it is hypothesized that:

H4: Societal meaninglessness will negatively influence job satisfaction.

H5: Client meaninglessness will negatively influence job satisfaction.

## 2.4 The influence of politicking and job satisfaction

Next to policy pressures, we also examine pressures coming from organizational politics, or politicking (Mintzberg, 1983; Morgan, 2006; Pfeffer, 1981). Bacharach and Lawler (1980:1,4) contend that people in organizations are constantly bargaining, forming coalitions and using influence tactics. Politicking is considered normal practice in organizations, happening every day. However, it is also viewed in a pejorative way. This can be seen by the definition of politics by Mintzberg (1983:172): "politics refers to individual or group behaviour that is informal, ostensibly parochial, typically divisive, and above all, in the technical sense, illegitimate". Organizational members also often perceive politics negatively. For instance, Gandz and Murray (1980:244), using a survey of 428 respondents, conclude that "In terms of general affect, respondents felt that politics are generally bad, unfair, unnecessary, unhealthy and conflictual".

Politicking has been studied in primarily two ways (Witt et al., 2000). On the one hand, it has been viewed as objective behaviour whereby political tactics – such as self-promotion, sweet-talking or bargaining - are investigated. On the other hand, politicking has been viewed subjectively, in which perceptions of politics are being examined (Ferris et al., 1996; Vigoda, 2000). In this study we adopt the second view, examining politicking using employee perceptions (see also Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris et al., 1996; Witt et al., 2000). This is based on the notion of Lewin (1936) that people behave on the basis of their perceptions of reality, not on the basis of reality itself. Perceived politicking should show the strongest relationship to work outcomes, such as job satisfaction.

Numerous studies have indicated that the perception of workplace politics has a negative impact on job satisfaction (for example Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris et al., 2002; Gandz & Murray, 1980), although they did not focus on professionals working in the public sector. It seems logical that when employees experience negative job satisfaction when they perceive that promotions, pay or projects are awarded based on political considerations, rather than on merit (Witt et al., 2000:343). Further, a high degree of perceived politicking can lead to an unwillingness to share knowledge, considerable delays as people first check actions with superiors or other influential persons, which can also decrease job satisfaction (Allen et al., 1979). Therefore, we expect that when professionals experience more politicking in their organization, their job satisfaction will decrease.

H6: A higher degree of (perceived) politicking will negatively influence job satisfaction

## 2.5 Politicking and tactical powerlessness

Witt et al. (2000, see also Ferris et al., 1996; Witt, 1995; ) argue that when employees are engaged in discussions about important issues in their work and develop consensus to resolve these issues, they are less affected by organizational politics. More specifically, they state that the more employees participate in decision making, the less organizational

politicking influences job satisfaction. Or, one can argue that in organizations where there is a high level of politicking, it is especially important to engage people in decisions (Witt, 1995; Witt et al., 2000). Participation in decision making reduces uncertainty as employees know what to expect from decisions. Further, this participation creates co-ownership and recognition for the employees. This can generate feelings of security and protection, which is highly needed in a political environment.

Tactical powerlessness has a close link with participation in decision making in an organization. In fact, it can be considered as a special type of participation; that is, (the inverse of) participation in decision making regarding a specific policy (Tummers, forthcoming 2011). We expect that in highly politicized organizations, the negative influence of tactical powerlessness on job satisfaction is especially strong.<sup>2</sup> In highly politicized organizations, professionals face more insecurity, stress and anxiety (Pfeffer, 1981). When such an organization has to implement a new policy, it is highly relevant to engage professionals, as this enhances the professionals' feelings of security and control, something which is much needed in such organizations. Professionals know what to expect from a new policy and have a say in decisions. The level of stress and insecurity will decline, positively influencing job satisfaction. On the other hand, in organizations where there is a low degree of politicking, it seems less relevant to engage professionals in decision making as the feelings of security, control and protection are already more present.

In more technical terms, we expect an interaction effect to occur. This is 'an effect in which a third independent variable causes the relationship between a dependent/independent variable pair to change, depending on the value of the moderating variable' (Hair et al., 1998:145). We expect that the degree of politicking in an organization strengthens the effect of tactical powerlessness on job satisfaction.

H7: The effect of tactical powerlessness on job satisfaction is strongest among professionals working in a highly politicized environment

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<sup>2</sup> We view politicking as the 'moderator' (Aiken & West, 1990) variable, while Witt et al. (2000) indicated participation in decision making as the moderator variable, not politicking. The choice which variable is the moderator does not change the statistical analyses, but is based on theoretical arguments. We choose for politicking as the moderator as tactical powerlessness is more easily influenced than the perception that an organization is politicized. In this way, we for instance distinguish the tactical powerlessness – job satisfaction relationship in a highly politicized environment versus the tactical powerlessness – job satisfaction relationship in a mildly politicized environment.

### 3 Method

#### 3.1 Sampling and response

To test the hypotheses, we undertook a survey of Dutch mental healthcare professionals implementing a new reimbursement policy. We used a sampling frame of 5,199 professionals, members of two nationwide mental healthcare associations (Nederlands Instituut van Psychologen and Nederlandse Vereniging voor Psychiatrie). These are all the members of these associations who could work with the DRG-policy, and therefore could experience policy pressures. In the personalized email, we explained the purpose of the study, invited participation, and indicated that responses would be analysed anonymously. Using the email and two reminders, we received 1,317 returns of our questionnaire; a response of 25%.

Gender composition of this group is consistent with the real distribution among Dutch mental healthcare professionals (Palm et al., 2008). Respondents' age was slightly higher than that of mental healthcare professional population (48 against 44). As the response rate was 25%, we conducted a non-response research, but this did indicate that a bias in the respondents. Major reasons for not participating were lack of time, retirement, change of occupation or not working with the DRG-policy (some organizations did not work with the DRG-policy yet, such as some hospitals). Given the large number of respondents, the similarity of the respondents on demographic variables and the results of the non-response research, we can be convincingly confident that our respondents were representative for the population.

#### 3.2 Measures

Here, we report the measurement of our variables. All items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

##### *Policy alienation sub-dimensions*

Tummers (2009) followed the scale development techniques of DeVellis (2003) to measure policy alienation. We use the scales as developed there. Additionally, for strategic powerlessness and client meaninglessness we constructed some additional items as these scales were rather compact. We chose to retain these items based on a) exploratory factor analysis and b) reliability analysis (Cronbach alpha).

Strategic powerlessness was measured using six items, which sought to elicit information about the perceived influence of the professionals on decisions concerning the content of the policy, as is captured in rules and regulations. Sample items on the scale were 'In my opinion, mental healthcare professionals had too little power to influence the DRG-policy' and 'We, mental healthcare professionals, were completely powerless during the introduction of the DRG-policy'. The results from the present study had a Cronbach's alpha of .85.

Tactical powerlessness was also assessed using a six-item scale. These items tap into a professional's perceived influence on decisions concerning the way the DRG-policy was implemented in their institution. Sample items were 'In my institution, especially mental healthcare professionals could decide how the DRG-policy was implemented (R: reverse item)' and 'Mental healthcare professionals were not listened to over the introduction of the DRG-policy in my institution'. This scale's Cronbach alpha was .87.

Operational powerlessness looks at the discretion of a professional while implementing a policy (Lipsky, 1980). Sample items were 'I have freedom to decide how to use DRGs (R)' and 'When I work with DRGs, I have to adhere to tight procedures'. The scale had a Cronbach alpha of .83.

Societal meaninglessness reflects the perception of professionals concerning the added value of a policy to socially relevant goals. Based on expert interviews, we concluded that DRGs had three main goals: 1. increasing transparency in costs and quality of mental health care, 2. increasing efficiency and, finally, 3. increasing patient choice among mental healthcare providers. Sample items were 'I think that the DRG-policy, in the long term, will lead to transparency in the costs of healthcare (R)' and 'Overall, I think that the DRG regulations lead to greater efficiency in mental healthcare (R)'. The Cronbach alpha of this scale was .96.

Client meaninglessness here refers to the perception of professionals about the added value of them implementing the DRG-policy for their own clients. For instance, do they perceive that they are really helping their patients by implementing this policy? Sample items were 'Because of the DRG-policy, I can help patients more efficiently than before (R)' and 'The DRG-policy is contributing to the welfare of my patients (R)'. The scale had a Cronbach alpha of .80.

#### *Politicking*

To measure politicking in an organization, we used the scale of Bouckenhooghe et al. (Bouckenhooghe et al., 2009). This scale uses four items in order to capture the extent to which political games are played in an organization. Some items for this scale were 'In our organization, favouritism is an important way to achieve something' and 'Within our organization, power games between the departments play an important role'. The Cronbach alpha of this scale was .96.

#### *Job satisfaction*

We used one item to measure job satisfaction: 'Overall, I am satisfied with my job'. We opted for this single item measure, as Nagy (2002:85) states that it is often better to measure job satisfaction with only one item, as 'it is more efficient, is more cost-effective, contains more face validity, and is better able to measure changes in job satisfaction'.

#### *Control variables*

Alongside the variables described above, we included commonly used control variables in our multivariate analysis. We included gender, age and management position (yes/no). We also looked at the influence of occupation, using indicating if a professional was a psychiatrist or not (so a psychologist or psychotherapist or both, but not a psychiatrist). This was the best way to reduce multicollinearity, which was caused by the fact that professionals could have multiple professions. Further, we used a variable showing whether a professional works (partly) in a private practice or works only in an institution. This is taken into account, as professionals may have different experiences when he or she works only in an institution or in a private practice.

### 3.3 Regression analysis

We used regression analysis to examine the influence of the factors and control variables on the job satisfaction of public professionals, a common and appropriate method for examining

relationships between a set of independent variables on a dependent variable. More specifically, we use moderated multiple regression to examine the moderating influence of tactical powerlessness on the politicking-job satisfaction relationship, which is a preferred method of examining interaction effects (Aiken & West, 1991; Stone-Romero & Anderson, 1994). We standardized all predictor variables to reduce multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991).

## **4 Results**

### **4.1 Descriptive statistics**

Descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables are presented in Table 2. As can be seen, all bivariate correlations for the variables linked through our hypotheses were statistically significant and in the anticipated direction. For example, job satisfaction was negatively related to societal meaninglessness and to politicking

**Table 2 Descriptive statistics for the variables in the study**

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Sex (male= ref. cat.)	.64	NA for dummys	1											
2. Age	47.94	11.01	-.34**	1										
3. Occupation psychiatrist	.42	NA	-.28**	.22**	1									
4. Working only in private practice	.16	NA	-.07**	.27**	n.s.	1								
5. Working partly in private practice	.17	NA	-.13**	.14**	n.s.	-.20**	1							
6. Management Position	.44	NA	-.26**	.19**	.39**	-.13**	n.s.	1						
7. Strategic powerlessness	6.67	1.65	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.12**	n.s.	n.s.	1					
8. Tactical powerlessness	6.53	1.90	n.s.	.09**	n.s.	-.11**	n.s.	n.s.	.37**	1				
9. Operational powerlessness	6.38	1.81	-.07*	n.s.	.13**	-.21**	n.s.	.12**	.32**	.42**	1			
10. Societal meaninglessness	7.70	1.67	-.17**	.18**	.15**	.08**	n.s.	.10**	.36**	.28**	.39**	1		
11. Client meaninglessness	7.73	1.53	-.12**	.17**	.13**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.37**	.33**	.43**	.69**	1	
12. Politicking	5.61	2.03	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.20**	.10**	n.s.	.10**	.34**	.24**	.09**	.13**	1
13. Job satisfaction	7.99	1.95	n.s.	n.s.	-.15**	.16**	n.s.	n.s.	-.12**	-.25**	-.33**	-.17**	-.15**	-.25**

Note. n.s. = not significant, \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01. The mean scores for the variables (from nr. 7) are shown in 10-point-scale, to increase ease of interpretation.

Self-reported data based on a single application of a questionnaire can result in inflated relationships between variables due to common method variance, i.e. variance that is due to the measurement method rather than the constructs themselves (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). We conducted a Harman one-factor test to evaluate the extent to which common method variance was a concern. A factor analysis was conducted on all 43 items used to measure the variables covered by the hypotheses. We opted for a principle components analysis as this is seen as the preferred method when analysing more than 20 items. We further opted for oblique rotation because we expected, based on the proposed theoretical framework, the factors to be related. The factors together accounted for 70% of the total variance (using the 'eigenvalue > 1' criterion). The most significant factor did not account for a majority of the variance (only 33%). Given that no single factor emerged and the first factor did not account for a majority of the variance, common method variance does not seem to be a major concern here.

## 4.2 Regression results

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the extent to which the policy alienation dimensions and politicking were able to predict job satisfaction (Hypotheses 1 to 7). In each model, the change in  $R^2$  is calculated, and we determine whether each change is significantly different from zero.

In the first model, with only control variables in the equation, the  $R^2$  was .06 ( $F=8.60$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Adding the powerlessness dimensions in the second model increased  $R^2$  to .15. On inserting other variables in the subsequent models, the  $R^2$  increased further, to .19 in model 5. Thus, the combination of the various dimensions of policy alienation and of politicking influenced the job satisfaction as experienced by public professionals. We can now consider the individual hypotheses in more detail.

Hypothesis 1 predicts that the degree of strategic powerlessness experienced by public professionals will be negatively related to their job satisfaction. As **Error! Reference source not found.** shows, strategic powerlessness is not significantly related to job satisfaction. That is, this hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that the degree of tactical powerlessness will be negatively related to job satisfaction. The direct effect of tactical powerlessness on job satisfaction is indeed significant ( $\beta=-.13$   $p<.01$ ). Hence, we did not reject our hypothesis.

The third hypothesis looks at the influence of operational powerlessness on job satisfaction. As could be expected from the literature on professions, the results indicate that a greater sense of operational powerlessness (or less autonomy) does indeed strongly decrease the job satisfaction of public professionals ( $\beta=-.24$   $p<.01$ ).

Hypothesis 4 examines the influence of societal meaningfulness on job satisfaction. In our empirical analysis, this relationship is insignificant ( $\beta=-.06$   $p=n.s.$ ). Hypothesis 5 looks at the relationship between client meaningfulness and job satisfaction. The empirical results also do not support the hypothesised relationship ( $\beta=.05$   $p=n.s.$ ).

Hypothesis 6 examines the influence of politicking on the degree of job satisfaction. We expected that when there was a higher degree of politicking, the job satisfaction of the professionals would decrease. In our study, this was indeed the case ( $\beta=-.15$   $p<.01$ ).

Finally, we examined the interaction between tactical powerlessness and politicking.<sup>3</sup> This interaction effect indeed showed in our empirical analyses ( $\beta=-.66$   $p<.01$ ). Further, we

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<sup>3</sup> We also analysed if other interaction effects did occur, such as between client meaningfulness and politicking, but this was not the case. The only significant interaction effect occurred between tactical powerlessness and politicking. For this interaction effect, a strong theoretical basis exists (see chapter 2).

see that the change in the explained variance is significant and falls within the typical range of .01 to .03 for interaction effects in field studies (Chaplin, 1991). This means that when there is a high degree of (perceived) organizational politics in the organization, the influence of tactical powerlessness on job satisfaction is indeed higher. Figure 1 shows the relationship between tactical powerlessness and job satisfaction for two groups: one group with high politicking and one group with low politicking (Aiken & West, 1991)<sup>4</sup>. It indicates that high tactical powerlessness is more negative for job satisfaction when levels of perceived politicking are higher: the slope of the line is descending faster. In other words, influence during policy implementation organization may be particularly useful when there is a high degree of political behaviour in organizations.

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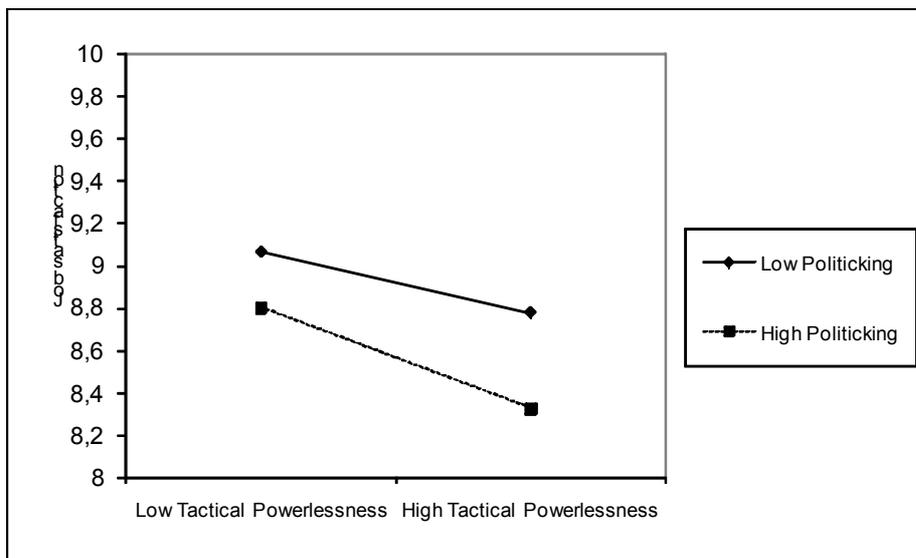
<sup>4</sup> The figure is based on the works of Jeremy Dawson, statistician Aston Business School, <http://www.jeremydawson.co.uk/slopes.htm>, two standardized variables.

**Table 3 Hierarchical regression analyses for variables predicting job satisfaction**

Variable	B	SEB	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
<u>Step 1 Control variables</u>					
Constant	7,84	.10			
Female	-.03	.07	-.02		
Male	Ref.cat.	Ref.cat.	Ref.cat.		
Age	-.03	.07	-.01		
Occupation: Psychotherapist	<b>-.35**</b>	<b>.07**</b>	<b>-.18**</b>		
Occupation: Not a psychotherapist	Ref.cat.	Ref.cat.	Ref.cat.		
Working only in private practice	<b>.34**</b>	<b>.07**</b>	<b>.18**</b>		
Working partly in private practice	.19	.18	.04		
Working in institution	Ref.cat.	Ref.cat.	Ref.cat.		
Managing position	.28	.14	.07		
Non-management position	Ref.cat.	Ref.cat.	Ref.cat.	<b>.06**</b>	
<u>Step 2 – Policy alienation – powerlessness dimensions</u>					
Strategic powerlessness	-.03	.07	-.02		
Tactical powerlessness	<b>-.25**</b>	<b>.07**</b>	<b>-.13**</b>		
Operational powerlessness	<b>-.46**</b>	<b>.07**</b>	<b>-.24**</b>	<b>.15**</b>	<b>.10**</b>
<u>Step 3 – Policy alienation – meaninglessness dimensions</u>					
Societal meaninglessness	-.11	.09	-.06		
Client meaninglessness	.10	.09	.05	<b>.16**</b>	.00
<u>Step 4 – Politicking</u>					
Politicking	<b>.60**</b>	<b>.21**</b>	<b>-.15**</b>	<b>.17**</b>	<b>.02**</b>
<u>Step 5 – Two way interaction</u>					
Tactical Powerlessness * Politicking	<b>-1.29**</b>	<b>.29**</b>	<b>-.66**</b>	<b>.19**</b>	<b>.02**</b>

Note: \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01. Standardized variables used.

Criteria:  
 Criterion of independent residuals met (Durbin-Watson 2.1, 1 < criterion < 3). Criterion of no multicollinearity (No VIF-values above 10 and average close to 1, after controlling for multicollinearity interaction effects (Aiken & West, 1991)). No exclusion of influential outlying cases was required (using casewise diagnostics: 4.6% above standardized residual > |2|, Cook's distance max. 0.06 (criterion < 1). Criteria of homoscedasticity and normality were met; residuals randomly distributed and distribution of frequency resembles normal curve.



**Figure 1 The degree of politicking in an organization influences the tactical powerlessness-job satisfaction relationship**

## 5 Conclusions

In public administration, there is an intense debate on the pressures facing public professionals in service delivery. In this paper, we examined how two important pressures - from implementation of public policy and from organizational politics - influence the job satisfaction of public professionals, a key outcome variable. Based on literature from the policy implementation and organizational politics streams, a theoretical model was constructed. This model was tested in a survey of 1,317 mental healthcare professionals implementing a new reimbursement policy. The model worked adequately in that the policy alienation dimensions and politicking, together with conventional control variables, explained 19% of the variance in job satisfaction, which is a high percentage given the number of possible influences on job satisfaction.

More specifically, we observed that operational powerlessness strongly negatively influenced the job satisfaction of public professionals. Hence, when professionals feel that they have no autonomy during the implementation of a policy, they will be less satisfied with their jobs. This study is innovative as it quantitatively shows the important role of perceived autonomy during policy implementation on the job satisfaction of public professionals. This adds significance to statements in the current debate on pressured professionals, where scholars note that the autonomy of professionals - one of the defining characteristics of professionals - is declining (Exworthy & Halford, 1998; Freidson, 2001; Harrison & Ahmad, 2000). Where this is indeed the case, this could be particularly harmful for the job satisfaction of these professionals.

Secondly, we examined that both tactical powerlessness and politicking negatively influenced job satisfaction. Moreover, they reinforce each other: the effect of tactical powerlessness on job satisfaction is strongest among professionals working in a highly politicized environment. Influence is likely to reduce insecurity and increase control, by sharing power and information where-ever possible, which is especially important in such a situation (Witt et al., 2000). This emphasizes the contextual nature of policy implementation by front-line professionals. In some organizations, it will be more relevant to engage professionals in the way the organization implements the policy. Practitioners and scholars could use this insight to enhance their understanding of the way participation during policy implementation and organizational contexts influence each other. As Elmore (1985) noted, policy making can be viewed as a process of backward-mapping, where bargaining between local actors is key element of successful implementation. Adding to this, we can state for job attitudes of implementing professionals, explicitly involving them in these bargaining processes is especially important in organizations where there is a high level of perceived politics.

We end the article by providing a suggestion for future research. The results of this study, and the implications outlined, should be interpreted in light of the study's context and sample. Although the study's generalizability was improved by the fact that the sample included a large number of public professionals, working in different occupations, positions and places, one should be cautious in generalising this to other public-sector policies or domains. An area for further research would be to test the proposed model using other types

of policies in a range of public domains. Here, a comparative approach might work adequately, examining different kinds of policies in various organizational contexts. This approach would add to the debate concerning professionals in the public sector.

Concluding, this study provides insights that help to understand the pressures public professionals face in service delivery. It shows that influence and autonomy during policy implementation, and perceived politics, all influence the job satisfaction of public professionals. Moreover, it shows that influence during policy implementation is especially important when there is a high degree of perceived politicking. Embracing and further researching the pressures of public professionals should prove to be a timely and productive endeavour for both researchers and practitioners alike.

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