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Introduction

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Teachers, healthcare workers, and police officers, as well as other public employees working on the frontline of public service delivery, are often confronted with new policy programs that, usually, lead to new rules and regulations that have to be implemented. We broadly define policies as “purposive courses of actions followed by a government in dealing with a problem or a matter of concern” (Anderson, 1975, p. 3). The fact that these ‘frontline workers’ are often confronted with new policies is, of course, in itself, not problematic: democratically elected governments have the mandate to do so (Dunsire, 1978; Barrett, 2004). However, this can influence the way in which frontline workers perform their tasks, as grown practices may be challenged – over and over again. For the successful implementation of policies, policymakers are dependent on the willingness of frontline workers – sometimes also termed ‘street-level bureaucrats,’ ‘frontline officials’ or ‘public (service) employees’ – to co-operate (Lipsky, 1980; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980; Meyers *et al.*, 1998; Hill & Hupe, 2009; Tummers *et al.*, 2009; Brodtkin, 2012; Gofen, 2014; Van Engen *et al.*, 2016). The latter need to tailor the formers’ policies to their clients’ needs (Sommer Harrits & Ostergaard Moller, 2014), deal with conflicting demands from different policies (Tummers *et al.*, 2015), and have discretion in doing so (Lipsky, 1980). However, research has shown that frontline workers’ actual behavior during policy implementation does not necessarily align with policymakers’ ambitions (Brehm & Gates 1999; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; May & Winter, 2009). For instance, frontline workers may make accessing the public service more difficult for clients when work pressure is high (Tummers *et al.*, 2015), such as when a police officer telling a client who wants to report a crime: “The office is very busy today, return tomorrow if you wish” (cf. Triandafyllidou, 2003) – even though a responsive and citizen-oriented police culture may be a top priority for the government. In doing so, frontline workers can create major difficulties for (new) governments, democratically mandated to change policy and to implement new rules and regulations.

Indeed, it can be seen that frontline workers not only *can*, but also *do* create difficulties for governments, as well as societies. This can be illustrated by the following three examples. First, in 2007, 550.000 students in Israel were not receiv-

ing education, as their teachers had gone on strike to protest against a large-scale education reform (Berkovich, 2011). Second, in 2016, treatments for thousands of patients in England were disrupted when hospital doctors staged their first strike, thereby escalating political tensions over a publicly funded health care system (Castle, 2016). Third, in 2017, more than six times the average daily rate of homicides in Brazil was reported as a result of a police crisis (The Guardian, 2017).

This is problematic, because such actions may ultimately result in diminished legitimacy of the government (Bekkers *et al.*, 2007). It can cause tension and conflicts (Nutting *et al.*, 2011), and result in suboptimal circumstances for society at large, as public funds are invested in the formulation and implementation of government policies that are, apparently, not supported by frontline workers. Ultimately, this impedes the improvement of public service provision, as this is only likely to be achieved if actors operating at different levels of the system collaborate (Bryson *et al.*, 2015; Page *et al.*, 2015).

Scholars have held contradictory views on policy implementation. For a long time, policy implementation was treated as a rather mechanistic activity. Van Meter and Van Horn (1975, p. 450) even described policy implementation as “a series of mundane decisions and interactions unworthy of the attention of scholars.” Top-down perspectives tend to treat deviations from the policy-on-paper as a control problem where room for interpretation makes it increasingly likely that policy means and ends will be mismatched (Howlett, 2004). Research usually has served to support a normative approach that prescribed clear policy goals and the operational steps needed to achieve them (Brodkin, 2012). However, insights changed as it became clear that implementation may lead to a reformulation of policies, to other outcomes than expected, or even to outright failure (e.g., Elmore, 1979; Lipsky, 1980; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980). These critiques showed that the earlier models of policymaking and public management were “not effective in practice, nor convincing in theory” (Parsons 1995, p. 468). As a result, new models were developed that emphasized the complexities of policy implementation and the prominent role fulfilled by frontline workers as a consequence of their discretion. From this bottom-up perspective, frontline workers are seen as *de facto* policymakers and problem solvers who adjust policies to the specific context and needs of their clients (Elmore, 1979; Brodkin, 2011; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). In this view, “if local implementers are not given the freedom

to adapt the program to local conditions it is likely to fail” (Matland, 1995, p. 148). This underscores the importance of alignment between policymakers and policy implementers for successful policy implementation and, particularly, the relevance of evaluating how frontline workers perceive and enact government policies.

Surprisingly, the experiences of frontline workers with new policies have been often studied in isolation (e.g., Handley & Howell-Moroney, 2010; Sager *et al.*, 2014). This ignored the fact that these policies were and are not developed in a vacuum (Hogwood & Peters, 1982). For instance, studies might consider how teachers perceive a new inclusive education policy, how healthcare workers appreciate new procedures to finance healthcare, or how police officers evaluate new guidelines for criminal investigations and how this relates to their willingness to implement them. Our point is not that this focus is not meaningful or relevant for academics or practitioners – because it is. However, as we will show throughout this thesis, if we want to fully understand implementation success or failure of specific policies, we should take into account frontline workers’ experiences with previous government policies. Very often, their experiences with current policies have ‘a history’ - because they build upon earlier experiences with other (related) policies. This process can be described as policy accumulation (In ’t Veld, 1989) where there is continuous aggregation of policies that follow upon each other. What this accumulation notion suggests is that frontline workers have a certain predisposition, with varying degrees of positivity, towards policies in general. Insights from change management studies - where terms such as ‘change fatigue’ and ‘change cynicism’ are used - show that employees’ previous experiences of change affect their openness and willingness to change at a later stage (Bordia *et al.*, 2011). This implies that frontline workers could become indifferent to whatever new policy (change) is introduced, viewing new policies as just the new ‘political flavor of the month’ (cf. Herold *et al.*, 2007).

To systematically and coherently analyze frontline workers’ experiences with specific government policies, Tummers, Bekkers and Steijn (2009) developed the policy alienation framework. Policy alienation is defined as a “cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the policy...” (2009, p. 268) and consists of two main dimensions: policy powerlessness and meaninglessness.

In the realm of policy formulation and implementation, policy powerlessness relates to the degree of influence frontline workers have (or rather lack) over shaping the policy as introduced by the government. This power may be exercised on the strategic, tactical, or operational level (Tummers *et al.*, 2009). Strategic powerlessness refers to the perceived influence of professionals on decisions concerning the content of a policy, as captured in rules and regulations at the government level. Tactical powerlessness refers to professionals' perceived influence over decisions concerning the way a policy is executed within their own organization. Operational powerlessness relates to the degree of discretion professionals have during actual policy implementation. Examples include the degree to which doctors and nurses have the impression that they can influence healthcare reforms at the national level, or the degree to which teachers feel that they have discretion during the implementation of inclusive education.

Policy meaningfulness refers to the perception of the contribution a policy makes to a greater purpose. Two types of meaningfulness are distinguished: societal and client meaningfulness. The former refers to the perception of professionals concerning the added value of policies to socially relevant goals. The latter reflects the perception of professionals regarding the value added for their own clients. Examples include the degree to which police officers believe that the instalment of a national DNA database results in an increased number of solved crimes, or the degree to which youth care workers believe that the decentralization of youth care is beneficial for their young clients.

1.1.1 Main research question

However, as we discussed above, it is relevant to investigate not only how frontline workers experience specific policies, but also how they identify with *government policies in general*. We argue that not taking the latter into account might result in a failure to understand why the implementation of new government policies is, or is not, supported by frontline workers. We can illustrate this with an example. Elizabeth and Jack are both secondary school teachers and both confronted with a new government policy that aims to tackle the growing educational inequality in their country. When asked, both Elizabeth and Jack indicate that they support the new policy's goals. They believe that the funding, as well as the training opportunities, are sufficient and they have considerable discretion when imple-

menting the policy, and feel self-confident in doing so. However, it turns out that Jack acts in line with the policy and contributes to make its implementation a success, whereas Elizabeth does not. Why? Not because they differ in terms of their support for the specific policy, but because Jack identifies with government education policies in general, whereas Elizabeth does not. Overall, Jack supports government education policies. He has the impression that they address relevant problems, that they allow school leaders and teachers to have a say in their set-up, and that they leave room for tailored implementation at the school level. Elizabeth, on the other hand, is much more critical of government education policies. She feels that policies do not tackle urgent problems – and if they do, they do so often in an ineffective way. She feels school leaders and teachers are not listened to during policy formulation, and that there is little discretion for school leaders and teachers during implementation. This, their ‘policy predisposition,’ influences Jack and Elizabeth’s willingness to implement a new policy – regardless of their evaluation of the newly introduced policy in itself.

The policy alienation framework (Tummers, 2012) does not take the effect of the accumulation of previous experiences into account and does not allow for the evaluation of general government experiences. Therefore, in this thesis, we investigate how we can further develop the framework to take this effect into account and how this can be helpful to analyze the effect of previous policy experiences on frontline workers. In doing so, we introduce the term ‘general policy alienation,’ based on distinctions made in the literature between general and specific trust (Kenning, 2008) and general and specific self-efficacy (Schwoerer *et al.*, 2005). Whereas we use the term policy alienation to refer to experiences with specific policies, we use the term general policy alienation to refer to frontline workers’ experience with overall government policies. Besides further developing the policy alienation framework, we first investigated which factors might influence general policy alienation. In this way, this thesis aims to provide more insight in the role factors, such as policy consistency, policy discretion, and policy accumulation, may play in policy support. Second, we investigated the influence of general policy alienation on implementation willingness. Based hereon, this thesis aims to provide more insight regarding the extent to which general policy perceptions, in interaction with evaluations of specific policy characteristics, might influence how willing frontline workers are to implement new policies. As

such, our study connects to broader debates on policy implementation, policy legitimacy and alignment, and discretion at the frontline (e.g., Wallner, 2008; Hupe & Hill, 2009; Brodtkin, 2012, Gofen, 2014; Tummers *et al.*, 2015).

Summarizing, the main goal of this study was to analyze whether and to what extent frontline workers experienced general policy alienation, but also why this was the case and what the implications are for frontline workers' implementation willingness. Therefore, the central research question of this thesis is:

How can the general policy alienation of frontline workers be conceptualized and measured, what are its causes and what is its influence on implementation willingness?

1.1.2 Subsidiary research questions

To answer the main research question, a number of subsidiary research aims were formulated.

First, we aimed to conceptualize and measure general policy alienation. As outlined above, we developed this concept in order to allow for the conceptual distinction between frontline workers experiences with specific and overall government policies. First, we investigated how we could conceptualize general policy alienation, and how we could clearly distinguish general from specific policy alienation. Providing a straightforward conceptualization is especially relevant in light of our second research aim: measuring general policy alienation. Hinkin (1998) stated that if you do not provide a clear conceptualization, you would end up with a scale that is not valid: it does not capture the phenomenon you aim to measure. We were interested in developing a measure of general policy alienation. This would allow us to quantitatively test its relationship with other variables, including, as we discuss below, policy consistency and implementation willingness. In doing so, we adopted a systematic approach to develop valid and reliable scales for general policy alienation, because "The point is not that adequate measurement is 'nice'. It is necessary, crucial... Without it we have nothing" (Korman, 1974, p. 194).

Second, we aimed to further investigate the effects of policy accumulation on how frontline workers perceive and implement policies. Hogwood and Peters (1982) noted that in the study of policymaking and policy analysis, scholars often

speak of creation, birth, and innovation, as though policies came new into the world. In reality, they argued, new policies are rarely written on a tabula rasa, but rather on a well-occupied or even crowded tablet of existing laws, organizations and clients. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011, p. 8) even stated, “the detail of public sector reforms turns out to be more like geological sedimentation, where new layers overlie but do not replace or completely wash away the previous layer”. However, we do not argue that the accumulation of policies is, in itself, problematic for frontline workers. Rather, we believe that particularly the degree to which policies are consistent – both over time and in relation to each other – influences how frontline workers perceive policies. When frontline workers have to decide whether or not to put effort into implementing a new policy, their government’s past performance in maintaining their policies becomes an important consideration (cf. White *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, frontline workers can suffer from a status quo bias, i.e. they have a preference for policies as they currently are (Arnold & Fleischman, 2013). This argues in favor of a positive effect of policy consistency on frontline workers’ policy perceptions, including how meaningful and legitimate policies are. So far, this has not been tested empirically.

Third, we aimed to evaluate how general policy alienation influences frontline workers’ implementation willingness. The topic of discretion continues to be debated in policy design and policy implementation (Tummers & Bekkers, 2014; Veronesi & Keasey, 2015; Cooper, 2017). However, little attention has been paid to the implicit link assumed between frontline workers’ discretion and the motivation to implement government policies. To explore the motivational effects of discretion, we drew on the logic of the Thomas theorem: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas, 1928). Hence, we focused on the perceived degree of discretion, and investigated to what extent frontline workers feel powerful (i.e., the opposite of powerlessness). Although psychological and change management literature suggests a positive link between powerfulness and motivation (Lines, 2004; Gagné & Deci, 2015), scholars have not found a strong, consistent symmetric relation between policy powerfulness and implementation willingness (Tummers, 2011; Thomann, 2015). Therefore, it might be that an asymmetric explanation is more suitable, which we tested empirically.

Summarizing, the three subsidiary research questions are:

1. How can we conceptualize and measure frontline workers' general policy alienation?
2. What are the effects of policy consistency on frontline workers' evaluations of meaningfulness and legitimacy?
3. How does (general) policy alienation influence frontline workers' implementation willingness?

1.2 CASE STUDY: THE DUTCH SECONDARY EDUCATION SECTOR

Having introduced our main research questions, we now discuss our case study: the education sector. Research has indicated that frontline workers in this sector experience many problems with public policies. More specifically, school leaders and teachers experience many problems with national education policies. This is particularly relevant because they play a crucial role in delivering services. In 2016, for instance, over 12.000 teachers in Poland demanded not only a pay rise and retention of early retirement privileges, but also the dismissal of the Minister of Education (NOS, 2016). In 2015, stress levels among teachers in England were soaring: a survey among 3.500 members of a teaching union showed that more than two-thirds of respondents considered quitting the profession with their top-concerns being: work load, pay, inspection, and curriculum reform (Precey, 2015). In 2015, over 5.000 teachers in Seattle in the US started a strike. This strike was motivated by more than just by a wage dispute, as the following teacher's quote shows: "In spite of your portrayal of this being all about salary, it is about much, much more – it's about properly funding schools, respecting educators, giving kids the recess time that research shows they need, reducing severely overcrowded classrooms, dealing with racial inequity in our schools, making up for years without adequate cost-of-living adjustments in the state's most expensive city, and so much more" (Young, 2015).

The specific case we studied is the Dutch secondary education sector. This case is relevant for three reasons. First, the sector has experienced many problems in recent decades as a result of the reshuffling of authority and responsibili-

ties between the ministerial and the school levels (Pijl & Frissen, 2009). Second, the sector is characterized by numerous policy changes (Bronneman-Helmers, 2008). Third, research has shown that many school leaders and teachers are critical of government-initiated reform (Tweede Kamer, 2008). This makes it a suitable case to investigate policy implementation challenges, the consequences of policy accumulation and antecedents and effects of general policy alienation in-depth. This is illustrated by the following three quotes:

“Annoying are the continuous changes and additional tasks. A perfect example is the introduction of an obligatory social internship for all high school students. We embraced this policy, invested many of our funds in it, and really saw its added value. Then, the obligation was withdrawn, as well as the government funding. This, in my opinion, rewards schools that act negligent. As a result of this, when new policies are introduced by the government and you do want to loyally implement them – you eventually start thinking: Why would we?”

- School leader, interviewed for this thesis (2013)

“The maths test [a new, obligatory maths test introduced by the Dutch government] once again shows that Dutch education is unmanageable. Politicians play angry bosses who shout ‘SIT’ to their dogs. And whisper immediately afterwards: ‘Okay, keep on lying then.’ Schools know this, nod yes and do nothing. Consequence? The results of policies are always the opposite of the goals.”

- Ton van Haperen, Dutch education blogger (2015)

“What is wrong? The ink of a policy letter isn’t dry yet, or the next one is on its way. Changes do not get the chance to get ‘crystallized.’ The teacher is the professional... but...”

- Teacher, surveyed for this thesis (2016)

The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is responsible for the education system, its financing, and education quality. It formulates policies, takes measures and specifies certain standards, such as the content and quality

of final exams. Within this context, schools have to take responsibility themselves (Onderwijsraad, 2012). Schools and the Ministry are intrinsically connected and strongly dependent on each other. Both are intertwined by politics. However, over the last decennia, it seems a 'gap' has grown between these actors. Schools, in particular, have the impression that the Ministry and politics (i.e., the government) do not understand them. In the 2008 Dutch parliamentary research on education reform, the research commission (Commission Dijsselbloem), for instance, concluded that "political support seemed to be more important than the support of schools" (Tweede Kamer, 2008, p. 177) and that "the support of representatives of professional interest groups was equated with support of schools, while teachers, parents and students were hardly listened to during the policy process" (p. 188).

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has the political responsibility for the educational system and is bound by national legislation. The Ministry is responsible to a large extent for the financing of the education system. It also defines the general education policy and specifies the admission requirements, structure and objectives of the education system on general lines (EP-Nuffic, 2015). The Dutch education system consists of eight years of primary education, four, five or six years of secondary education (depending on student capacities) and two to six years of higher education (depending on the type of education and the specialization).

Unique to the Dutch system is its duality and the freedom of education. This freedom of education is a concept included in the Dutch constitution, article 23. As a consequence of 'article 23', the Dutch government provides the same financial support to public and private schools, as long as the schools meet certain basic quality and financial standards (EP-Nuffic, 2015). Article 23 also specifies the relationship between the government and school organizations. On the one hand, the government has the task to take active care of the education system as a whole. On the other hand, the government has to give discretion to schools, as all Dutch schools have the freedom to be organized according to their own convictions and ambitions. In the school year 2015-2016, approximately 960.000 Dutch students between the age of 12 and 18 followed secondary education. This is, depending on student capacities, either a preparatory secondary vocational education (four years), senior general secondary education (five years), or university

preparatory education (six years). They follow their education at 700 different schools at approximately 1.400 school locations (DUO, 2017). In total, there are almost 75.000 teachers working in Dutch secondary education and almost 3.100 school principals.

When we conducted our study, between 2013 and 2017, the cabinet of the Netherlands was the 'Rutte-Asscher cabinet', formed by the liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy ('VVD') and the social democratic Labour Party ('PvdA'). The Minister of Education was a PvdA member, and the Secretary of State (i.e., Junior Minister) for Education was a VVD member. The Secretary of State was responsible for secondary education, and introduced multiple policies, including a teacher development agenda, anti-bullying policy, and policies to stimulate excellence in secondary education. There is mixed empirical evidence on how positive secondary school teachers and principals were about these politicians and their policies. Our own study results, for instance, indicate that our respondents had relatively low trust in these politicians and were quite critical towards their policies.

1.3 RELEVANCE OF THE THESIS

Having introduced our main research interests, research questions and our case study, we now discuss why and how this thesis is relevant from both an academic and practitioner perspective.

1.3.1 Academic relevance

Our aim was for this study to contribute theoretically and methodologically to the public administration literature.

Theoretically, we aimed to contribute to knowledge on policy implementation and street-level bureaucracy by introducing the concept of general policy alienation and highlighting the importance of policy history. Although the literature recognizes the important role of frontline workers for policy implementation (Lipsky, 1980; Freidson, 2001; Bekkers *et al.*, 2007), public administration and management research still tends to marginalize the perspectives and experiences of those who enact the policy in practice (O'Toole, 2000; DeLeon & DeLeon,

2002; Barrett, 2004; Saetren, 2005; Werts and Brewer, 2015) and, particularly, the micro-level (psychological) underpinnings of this (cf. Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.*, 2017) - however, see Andersen and Jakobsen (2017) and Raaphorst (2018a) for recent, notable exceptions. This is peculiar, since policy implementation is often complex, contradictory, and still one of the main challenges for civil servants worldwide (O'Toole, 2004). Therefore, this matter deserves the ongoing attention of public administration and management scholars.

Our first contribution was to introduce the concept of general policy alienation and, thereby, acknowledge that frontline workers bring with them a history of government policy (changes), and, hence, general ideas about their effectiveness, legitimacy, and meaningfulness. In doing so, we emphasized that frontline workers were not neutral implementers. By studying policy experiences in relation to their historical context, we extend the theoretical work on policy accumulation (In 't Veld, 1989) and related concepts, such as policy succession (Hogwood & Peters, 1982), and institutional layering (Thelen, 2004).

Our second contribution was to investigate how frontline workers' policy perceptions might be improved. It has been noted "the cataloguing of failures when putting policies in place has been the hallmark of implementation studies since the 1970s" (May, 2015, p. 277). We, on the other hand, propose and show that policy consistency may contribute to improved policy perceptions of frontline workers by relying on work emphasizing the benefits of a rational policymaking perspective (e.g., Dunsire, 1979), as well as mostly political research on the status quo bias of civil servants (e.g., Fleming *et al.*, 2010).

Methodologically, we contribute by adopting relatively new and methodological approaches. First, we conducted quantitative street-level bureaucracy research. Traditionally, this type of research has been quite qualitative (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Lipsky, 1980; Sandfort, 2000, Maynard-Moody & Musheno 2003; Hill & Hupe, 2009). In this regard, it is not surprising that it has been noted "making the study of street-level bureaucracy both generalizable and comparative is an issue in its own right" (Hupe *et al.*, 2015, p. 326). Our quantitative approach allows for the large-scale testing of relevant theories and assumptions and, thereby, complements previous qualitative research (Van Engen, 2019). For instance, we adopt an experimental approach to investigate the effects of policy consistency on frontline workers' policy perceptions. Although experiments

often manipulate situations (i.e. situations are not ‘real’, which limits ecological validity), they also allow us to isolate and explore causal effects of interest in ways that other methods cannot (Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.*, 2017; James *et al.*, 2017). By doing so, we contribute to the emerging tradition of a ‘behavioral public administration’ (Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.*, 2017). Second, we developed two valid and reliable measures: a measure of general policy alienation (26 items) and a short measure of general policy alienation (5 items). It has been noted that the field of public administration lags behind as compared to other social sciences in the development of measurement scales (Perry, 2016). We proposed and used systematic procedures that, we hope, are helpful to researchers who aim to develop scales themselves. A greater emphasis on measurement, that we have contributed to, can help street-level bureaucracy and implementation research in making inferences that are also comparable across studies and contexts (Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.*, 2017).

1.3.2 Practical relevance

The discussion regarding the gap between research and practice in public administration and policy implementation research has never lost its salience (O’Toole, 2004). As noted by recent scholars, creating lasting and dynamic evidence-based policymaking systems requires a long-term commitment by both researchers and policymakers (VanLandingham & Silloway, 2016). Particularly, progress towards evidence-informed policymaking requires both improving the supply of research that is reliable, timely, and relevant to the policy process. In this light, as stated above, it is surprising that public administration and management research still tends to marginalize the perspectives and experiences of those who enact the policy in practice (O’Toole, 2000; DeLeon & DeLeon, 2002; Barrett, 2004; Saetren, 2005; Werts & Brewer, 2015).

Our study focused on policy implementation and contributes to the public administration practice in three ways. Firstly, our research may help national and local policymakers – basically, all (government) actors involved in policy implementation – to understand better why the implementation of their policies succeeds or fails. This applies, in particular, to sectors where governments rely heavily on frontline workers to achieve their intended policy changes. This includes: the healthcare sector (where governments rely on medical doctors and

nurses); the safety sector (where government rely on police and military); and, the education sector (where governments rely on school board governors, school leaders and teachers). Secondly, we developed measurement scales that can be used by policymakers or applied policy researchers to comprehensively (long, 26-item measure) or efficiently (short, 5-item measure) analyze how frontline workers experience government policies, also over time. If changes occur, or frontline workers indicate they feel extremely alienated, this may call for the introduction of appropriate interventions. In this way, this monitoring might help to improve the policy implementation process. Taking the experiences of frontline workers seriously may be a helpful tool to improve the relationship between policymakers and policy implementers. Thirdly, the practical recommendations we postulate – based on our research results – provide quite straightforward suggestions for politicians, public managers and civil servants to strengthen their policy implementation.

1.4 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

The three subsidiary research questions introduced in this chapter are addressed in four empirical chapters as summarized in Table 1.1 (on the next page). The columns refer to the chapters in this thesis and the specific research question to which they relate, as well as the data sources, and the methods applied. These aspects are explained in more detail below. Please note that the empirical chapters of this thesis were originally written as independent journal articles and can be read separately. As a consequence, there is some overlap of ideas between the chapters.

1.4.1 Empirical chapters

The following provides a brief abstract of all the empirical chapters.

Chapter 2. Taking previous policy experiences into account: Conceptualizing and measuring general policy alienation

To explicitly take account of frontline workers' previous experiences with government policies, we introduced the concept of general policy alienation. This

is defined as an overall cognitive disconnectedness from government policies, and conceptualized with two main dimensions: policy powerlessness and policy meaninglessness. Building on the policy alienation framework of Tummers (2012), we developed a valid and reliable 26-item measure of general policy alienation. This measure consists of five dimensions: strategic, tactical and operational powerlessness (six items each), and societal and client meaningfulness (four items each). In line with our assumptions, we found a relationship between general policy alienation, specific policy alienation (i.e., towards specific policy programs), policy consistency, transformational school leadership and, finally, implementation willingness.

Table 1.1 Outline of the empirical chapters

RQ	Chapter	Data source	Method	Published
1 How can we conceptualize and measure frontline workers' general policy alienation?	2 Taking previous policy experiences into account: Conceptualizing and measuring general policy alienation	Teachers (N=1.096)	Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, structural equation modeling	<i>Public Management Review</i> (2016)
	3 Developing a short measure of general policy alienation	School leaders and teachers (N=1.183; N=354; N=933)	Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, structural equation modeling	<i>Public Administration</i> (2017)
2 What are the effects of policy consistency on frontline workers' evaluations of meaningfulness and legitimacy?	4 Determining whether consistent government policies lead to greater meaningfulness and legitimacy on the frontline	Teachers (N=779)	ANOVA, ANCOVA, t-tests, regression analyses	<i>Public Administration</i> (2018)
3 How does (general) policy alienation influence frontline workers' implementation willingness?	5 Evaluating how powerfulness and meaningfulness influence implementation willingness	Teachers and healthcare workers (N=1.087; N=1.004)	Large-N set-theoretic configurational analysis	<i>Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory</i> (2018)

Chapter 3. Developing a short measure of general policy alienation

Given the limited questions that can be included in a typical survey, the 26-item length of the measure could have limited use for research. Therefore, one main goal of this study was to develop a valid and reliable short measure of general policy alienation. First, this frees up survey time researchers can then use to measure additional variables (Liden *et al.*, 2015). Second, an overload of items can introduce fatigue, or even boredom, among respondents, which may negatively influence the quality of the responses obtained (Crede *et al.*, 2012). Third, a short measure is more likely to be useful for other fields of public administration where general policy alienation is not the core subject matter, but could form a relevant contextual or explanatory factor. However, short measures may compromise validity if not developed using rigorous methods. This problem can be managed by applying the stringent 10-step approach we developed based on guidelines by, among others, DeVellis (2012) and Smith *et al.* (2000).

Chapter 4. Determining whether consistent government policies lead to greater meaningfulness and legitimacy on the frontline

Research has shown that frontline workers actual behavior during policy implementation does not necessarily align with policymakers' ambitions (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; May & Winter, 2009). This can be problematic for (new) governments democratically mandated to introduce new policies. Therefore, it is important to understand better how frontline workers, as well as other stakeholders, perceive and experience their policies over time. In this study, we focused on the effects of policy consistency. In other words, we studied how the continuity, certainty and predictability of policies over time influenced frontline workers. Specifically, we investigated with a survey experiment how policy (in)consistency affects perceived policy meaningfulness and government legitimacy. We also took into account the fact that this relationship may depend on policy content. Furthermore, given the apparent importance of discretion for frontline workers (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003), we also investigated if, and how, this effect is moderated by the degree of discretion policies allow for.

Chapter 5. Evaluating how powerfulness and meaningfulness influence implementation willingness

It has been shown repeatedly, that frontline workers have an important role in the successful implementation of policies as, inevitably, they retain some degree of discretion (Davis, 1969). However, little attention has been paid to the implicitly assumed link between frontline workers' discretion and the motivation to implement government policies. This is surprising, given that "research performed in ignorance of the understanding that implementing actors have about their circumstances is likely to miss important parts of the explanation" (O'Toole, 2000, p. 269). Therefore, in this study, we aimed to further disentangle the relationship between policy powerfulness, meaningfulness, and implementation willingness. Contrary to the other empirical chapters, we relied on an asymmetric explanation of policy implementers' motivation and, accordingly, investigated whether we could find evidence for an asymmetric relation between powerfulness and implementation willingness.

1.4.2 Data sources

Multiple data sources were used to conduct this study. Below, we briefly describe our data. More information is provided in the relevant chapters.

First, we collected large-scale survey data in June 2013 and June 2016. The respondents were members of a larger voluntary panel of public employees ('Flitspanel'), funded by the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. In total, the panel consisted of 35.000 Dutch public sector employees. To ensure the representativeness of the panel, the members were selected through the records of the pension fund for all Dutch government employees ('ABP') – in which all public employees are legally obliged to participate (for more information on the panel see <http://www.internetspiegel.nl>; other recent studies making use of this panel are Van Loon *et al.*, 2016 and Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). The 2013 sample consists of 1.183 school leaders and teachers. The 2016 sample consists of 993 school leaders and teachers. In some studies school leaders were excluded from the sample based on the research aims of the respective empirical chapters.

Second, to conduct the studies reported in chapter 2 and 4, we partially used secondary data. Firstly, 'Regioplan', a Dutch independent research organization, collected one dataset used for chapter 2. Survey data were collected in 2015 as

part of a policy evaluation study, conducted at the request of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. This sample consists of 354 school leaders and teachers. Secondly, Tummers (2012) collected one dataset used for chapter 5. Survey data were collected in 2010 to analyze, among others, frontline workers experiences with a new policy program. This sample consists of 1.317 healthcare professionals.

Open access

Transparency and reproducibility are key to good science. Two ingredients are essential for reproducibility in any field in science, namely: full disclosure of the methods used to obtain and analyze data; and, availability of the data that went into and came out of the analysis (Open Science Collaboration, 2015). To adhere with transparency and reproducibility guidelines, we will make the two datasets we collected for this research publicly available via dataverse. Please note that *all data we provide is fully anonymized and cannot be traced down to individual respondents.*

We believe that making our data publicly available will allow both researchers and practitioners to (re)use our data for academic, practical, as well as educational purposes. In addition, researchers can use our data to investigate other relationships than those reported in this thesis - not all data we collected were used. Academic teachers can use our data in statistical courses, so that students can use 'real life' data to learn how to conduct descriptive statistics or regression analyses. Also, survey respondents can experience survey fatigue due to overexposure to surveys. This is considered a main cause of increasing nonresponse (Steeh, 1981). By allowing other researchers to make use of our data, we hope to contribute to limiting questionnaires Dutch school leaders and teachers are confronted with.

1.4.3 Methods

We applied multiple methods and used multiple statistical programs to conduct our study.

First, we developed a 26-item measure of general policy alienation. Here, we applied exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to evaluate the factorial structure of the proposed measure. Then, we tested the construct and conver-

gent validity of the scale with structural equation modeling. To evaluate the convergent validity of our measure, we investigated the relationships between the five general policy alienation dimensions, the perception of a specific policy program, policy consistency, transformational leadership, and implementation willingness.

Second, we developed a short, 5-item measure of general policy alienation using a systematic 10-step procedure we developed based on guidelines by, among other, DeVellis (2012) and Smith *et al.* (2000). First, we evaluated face validity and reviewed our item pool with experts. Second, we evaluated the internal consistency reliability. Third, we applied exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to evaluate the factorial structure of the proposed measure. Furthermore, we conducted multi-group confirmatory factor analyses and tested whether our proposed short measure has measurement invariance, also known as measurement equivalence, across groups (Byrne, 2008). Finally, we evaluated convergent and discriminant validity. We evaluated the former by relating our short measure to the perception of a specific policy program, policy consistency, implementation willingness, and trust in government, and the latter by relating our short measure to the number of students at a school and whether a school was publicly or privately owned.

Third, we conducted a survey experiment to investigate the effect of policy consistency versus policy inconsistency on frontline workers perceptions of meaningfulness and legitimacy. Here, we applied ANOVA and ANCOVA tests to evaluate whether – in line with our hypotheses – respondents randomly assigned to the consistency manipulation score higher on meaningfulness and legitimacy than respondents randomly assigned to the inconsistency manipulation. We conducted regression analyses to further understand the effect of policy consistency. Here, we not only investigated the direct effect of policy consistency on meaningfulness and legitimacy, but also if, and how, this effect is moderated by discretion and by policy content.

Fourth, we used large-N set-theoretic configurational analysis, formal theory evaluation and comprehensive robustness tests (Ragin, 1987, 2000; Schneider & Wageman, 2012) to investigate the relationship between powerfulness and meaningfulness and implementation willingness – which, in chapter 5, we as-

sumed was asymmetric and non-linear. Set-theoretic configurational methods are designed to access such relations in term of necessity and sufficiency.

As stated above, we used multiple statistical programs for the analyses. We used version 6 of the statistical program *Mplus* (Muthen & Muthen, 2012). We used the statistical program *R*, specifically the *R*-packages 'lavaan' (Rosseel, 2012), 'psych' (Revelle, 2015), and 'semTools' (semTools Contributors, 2016) and *R*-packages 'QCA' (Dusa, 2007) and 'SetMethods' (Medzihorsky *et al.*, 2017). For the majority of the descriptive statistics, we used version 21-24 of the statistical program *SPSS*.