Conclusions and discussion

6.1 CONCLUSIONS

Teachers, healthcare workers and police, as well as other public employees working at 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. As we explained in the introductory chapter, 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, it can influence the way in which frontline workers perform their tasks, as grown practices may be challenged – repeatedly.

What has been neglected in the literature, so far, is the fact that frontline workers' experiences with new policies should not be studied in isolation. So, we have argued throughout this thesis that policies have a history. This results in frontline workers having a certain policy predisposition. This underscores the need for not only investigating frontline workers experiences with specific policy programs, such as the introduction of a new school curriculum, but also how they identify with government policies in general and, thus, whether or not they experience general policy alienation. 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. Hence, our main research question 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?

Before answering this question in the general conclusion, we first synthesize the results of the four empirical chapters.

6.1.1 Synthesizing the results

In the first study (chapter 2), we introduced the concept of general policy alienation, and defined it as the *overall* experience of frontline workers with government policies. We showed general policy alienation should be conceptualized as having two dimensions, namely: powerlessness (rather, frontline workers should

feel 'powerful' and feel they have the power to influence government policies at multiple levels); and, meaninglessness (rather, frontline workers should perceive policies as 'meaningful' and feel that government policies have added value for both society and their own clients).

Furthermore, theoretically we related general policy alienation to the consequences of policy accumulation, i.e. the continuous aggregation of policies that historically follow upon each other, and the new rules, regulations, and organizations that result. Despite the fact that some of our respondents did not experience any policy alienation at all – clearly, there are Dutch teachers that feel powerful and have the impression government policies are meaningful – the average scores on general policy were quite high. These scores indicate that Dutch secondary school teachers, in general, did not identify with government policies. They have the impression that they lack sufficient power to influence government policies at the national, organizational and personal level. Besides that, a significant number failed to perceive these policies as meaningful, either for society as a whole, or for their own students – or both. Relating these findings to the concepts of change fatigue and change cynicism, it may be that frontline workers experience something akin to policy fatigue or policy cynicism. This is not the same as private sector employees developing cynical attitudes that characterize organizational change efforts as just the 'flavor of the month' (Herold *et al.*, 2007), but rather it is about frontline workers developing cynical attitudes that characterize new policies as just the 'political flavor of the month'. This is a serious problem, especially for governments, as these frontline workers form a crucial link between formulated and implemented policies and, hence, between governments and citizens (Bartels, 2013; Tummers *et al.*, 2015).

In addition, our analyses found initial evidence that frontline workers' general policy perceptions were indeed related to their perceptions of a specific new policy program. That is, the analyses showed that frontline workers that had a relatively high level of general policy alienation also perceived specific policy programs (in our study: data-driven teaching) as less meaningful. This suggests that, if one wants to fully understand frontline workers' attitudes towards a specific new policy, both their perceptions of this new policy's characteristics, as well as their overall policy perceptions, should be investigated; ideally simultaneously. Excluding either set of perceptions is likely to result in an inability to put

forward satisfactory explanations of why frontline workers do, or do not, identify with a specific new policy.

Thus, the main advice resulting from this study would be to bring in policy history, and use it to shed light on frontline workers current experiences with policies.

Finally, the developed and validated measurement scale enables future researchers to quantitatively examine the antecedents and effects of general policy alienation. Although we conceptually link frontline workers' general policy alienation to the consequences of policy accumulation, we are not implying that general policy alienation is the result only of accumulated past policy experiences. Still, we have provided some initial evidence of the latter through our correlational analysis between policy consistency and general policy alienation. Greater perceived policy consistency - an indicator of more continuous policy accumulation - seems to be related to lower general policy alienation.

In the second study (chapter 3), we developed a short, but valid, and reliable measure of general policy alienation using three independently collected datasets. To do so, we adopted a systematic 10-step procedure that may also be helpful for researchers to develop short versions of other measures. This resulted in a five-item measure to gauge frontline workers' overall cognitive disconnectedness (or: connectedness) regarding government polices (Van Engen *et al.*, 2016). The measure allows future researchers to easily assess frontline workers' earlier experiences with government policies and to investigate the (behavioral) effects of this predisposition.

There are two main implications. The first is that there are now two validated measures of general policy alienation (a short and a long version). Although the current study has produced substantial evidence for the success of the short measure in capturing the essence of the original measure, the former cannot serve as a full replacement for the latter; the measures clearly serve different purposes. This implies that future researchers who want to use the policy alienation concept in their research should decide for themselves as to which measure is the best choice. If the aim of a study is to incorporate the effect of frontline workers' overall policy perceptions, then the short measure is recommended. Research on public service motivation reveals that much of the current understanding of this concept is based on studies using a general or global measure of PSM (e.g.,

Stazyk & Davis, 2015; for an overview see Wright *et al.*, 2013). The short measure of general policy alienation may serve this goal, too, as it is more easily integrated in surveys. We hope this will contribute to the application of the general policy alienation concept by public administration scholars world-wide.

This brings us to the second main implication. In recent years we have witnessed a clear increase in the number of quantitative public administration studies (Groeneveld *et al.*, 2015). In line with this, we have witnessed an increase in the number of measures being developed by public administration scholars (e.g., public leadership roles by Tummers & Knies, 2016 or red tape by Van Loon *et al.*, 2016). In light of the limited questions that can usually be included in a survey and the contextually rich studies that public administration scholars usually (aim to) conduct, it might be expected that short measures will be developed for these. Smith *et al.* (2000) noted that useful, valid and reliable short measures can only be developed by following strict procedures. We proposed and used a systematic 10-step procedure for developing our short measure. We hope other researchers will find this procedure useful. Although we are not the first in the public administration field to develop short measures, – with the work on public service motivation probably being the most exemplary (e.g., Vandenabeele, 2008; Kim *et al.*, 2013) – we believe that our 10-step procedure offers a good starting point for valid and reliable short measure development.

In the third study (chapter 4), we investigated the effect of policy consistency on how frontline workers' perceived policy meaningfulness and legitimacy. We designed a survey experiment in which we manipulated consistency (i.e., consistent versus inconsistent), as well as the policy topic (i.e., professional development of teachers versus education inequality). We found that, in line with our expectations, policy consistency positively affected perceptions of meaningfulness and, particularly, legitimacy. Apparently, frontline workers considered policies to have more added value and to be more legitimate if they were more consistent. This is possibly because it simply takes some time to identify with policies.

Furthermore, we tested how the relationship between policy consistency and meaningfulness and legitimacy was moderated by discretion. This is important, because street-level researchers have repeatedly shown that having discretion is of the utmost importance for frontline workers, as well as it being a defining characteristic of their work. We found that the effect of policy consistency on mean-

ingfulness and legitimacy was, indeed, affected by discretion; although this effect was not particularly strong, nor always statistically significant. Finally, we found that whether consistency leads to more meaningfulness and legitimacy is also influenced by the type of policy that is (dis)continued. Our results suggest that it was not necessarily the case that the continuation of a specific policy was always valued positively by frontline workers. Our results indicate that this depends on the type of policy under study, such as the main problem it aims to address, as well as the type of policy instruments adopted. In our study, this is underscored by the finding that the continuation of a policy that restricts professional leeway has a negative effect on teachers that experience low discretion.

To summarize, our findings underscore the potential positive impact of policy consistency on perceived meaningfulness and legitimacy. Although our study is to some extent at odds with the nature of political decision- and policymaking, it suggests that keeping an eye on policy consistency might be a useful strategy for governments to improve public service delivery by increasing policy support among frontline workers. Although frontline workers may not find a specific policy meaningful, or the best way to deal with societal challenges and create public value, they appear to be more likely to support this policy if they know – possibly from previous experience - that the government is willing and able to maintain this policy over time.

In the fourth and final empirical study (chapter 5), we adopted - contrary to the other chapters in this thesis - an asymmetric approach to study the relationship between powerfulness, meaningfulness and implementation willingness. Specifically, we tried to establish the motivating effect of powerfulness for implementation willingness, and how this depends on meaningfulness. We believed an asymmetric approach could be helpful, because it allowed us to detect whether the influence of powerfulness and meaningfulness might work only, or mainly, in one direction. In other words: the change in implementation willingness might not be of the same magnitude or direction when powerfulness is added as to when it is taken away (which is the case when we assume symmetric effects). This might help explain why in quantitative empirical studies, the relationship between powerfulness and implementation willingness appears to be not as strong as the literature on discretion during policy implementation suggests.

Our research results indicated, first, that powerfulness is a quasi-necessary condition for high implementation willingness. We concluded from analyses of two datasets collected in the Dutch education and healthcare sector that the majority of frontline workers who feel powerful also have high implementation willingness. Second, we tested whether powerlessness (i.e., the opposite of powerfulness) is a quasi-necessary condition for low implementation willingness. We found mixed evidence for this, which aligns with a classic insight from motivation theory; the things that make people feel satisfied and motivated can be different in kind from the things that make them feel dissatisfied (Herzberg *et al.*, 1959). So, while powerfulness can result in high implementation willingness, the 'opposite' is not automatically true as well, i.e. that powerlessness results in low implementation willingness. Third, and again in line with our assumptions, we found that, in combination with policy meaningfulness, powerfulness is quasi-sufficient for high implementation willingness. In other words, when frontline workers felt that they had both high powerfulness and that the policy was meaningful for society, this strengthened their willingness to implement it.

In summary, this study lends robust support to a bottom-up view on discretion as an inevitable and potentially beneficial aspect of frontline implementation, as we find that possibilities to participate in and influence public policies are, apparently, a prerequisite for frontline workers to be willing to implement the policy. In doing so, it shows street-level scholars how it can be useful sometimes to move from a correlational logic to the consideration of asymmetric patterns when studying policy implementation and frontline workers' critical role in successfully achieving this.

6.1.2 General conclusion

Researchers, traditionally studying bureaucracies and policymaking from a top-down perspective, have started to acknowledge the inevitability of the 'human factor' and, hence, the fact that individual preferences and personal standards play a role in discretionary decisionmaking at the frontline (Lipsky, 1980). Within the top-down perspective, this is generally regarded a problem of control. For instance, adopting a principal-agent approach, Brehm and Gates (1997) studied how those lower in order carried out requests from higher order principals. Likewise, the literature on policy implementation has focused mostly on the vertical

dimension of public government (Hupe *et al.*, 2015), where the central question is more or less how practices at the frontline align with policies-as-formulated (Brodkin, 2015).

The field of street-level bureaucracy focuses on bureaucrats at the frontline of government decisionmaking and implementation. Typical characteristics of these 'frontline workers' were that they had direct contact with citizens on a daily basis, and had considerable discretion in making decisions. Both these characteristics made them a relevant scholarly subject (Raaphorst, 2018b), because public policies inherently allocate scarce resources (Easton, 1965). Discretion is not only inevitable - policies, rules, and laws are simply never specific enough (Hoag, 2011) -, it is also necessary because frontline workers need to be responsive to individual needs (Evans, 2010). For instance, a police officer can decide whether or not to impose an on-the-spot-fine (Lipsky, 1980), regardless of the targets policymakers have set. Thus, policymakers are highly dependent on frontline workers. This explains why they can and *do* cause government's problems when they do not act in line with their policies (Brehm & Gates, 1999). In the current study, we were not particularly interested in whether this is desirable or not (one can easily think of arguments pro and con), but rather how our questioning could better understand the considerations of frontline workers when confronted with (new) policies.

Some years back, Tummers (2012) had a comparable interest and noticed "although prominent policy implementation scholars have emphasized the crucial role of implementers identifying with the policy, few have developed and tested a framework for analysing this topic" (O'Toole, 2000). Therefore, he developed the concept of policy alienation to analyze systematically and coherently to what extent frontline workers identified with specific government policies (Tummers *et al.*, 2009).

Our study clearly draws from this work, yet shows the added value of making a conceptual distinction between specific and general policy alienation. We define the latter as "an overall cognitive disconnectedness from government policies" (Van Engen *et al.*, 2016) and argue this distinction between frontline workers' specific and overall policy experiences is relevant for at least three reasons. First, we see that the experiences of frontline workers with new policies are often studied in isolation (e.g., Handley & Howell-Moroney, 2010; Sager *et*

al., 2014); thus ignoring the fact that these policies were and are not developed in a vacuum (Hogwood & Peters, 1982). Second, policy experiences should be understood in terms of their 'history'. We refer to this as policy accumulation; i.e. the continuous aggregation of policies that follow each other. Third, this distinction allows researchers to account for the fact that frontline workers might not support a specific new policy at all, but overall do support government policies in their field – or, obviously, the other way around.

All the reasons outlined above, underscore how adopting such a viewpoint may contribute to a more realistic and nuanced understanding of policy implementation success and failure. In line with the earlier work on policy alienation (Tummers, 2012), general policy alienation can best be conceptualized as having two main dimensions: powerlessness and meaninglessness. This is logical, because with these dimensions, it is acknowledged that to support a policy, frontline workers should at least feel that they have the power to influence government policies at the national, organizational and micro-level, as well as have the idea that the policies have added value for both society and clients. If these conditions are not present, it is more likely frontline workers will feel alienated from policies, both currently, as well as in the future.

With the help of the two general policy alienation measures we developed, this study firstly indicates that general policy alienation is related to frontline workers' perceptions of specific policies and their implementation willingness (Van Engen *et al.*, 2016). This means that, if frontline workers experience a higher degree of general policy alienation, they are also less likely to support a specific new policy introduced by the government. No matter how positive they may be about the new policy, their previous policy experiences affect them. In this example, this is in a negative way, although the opposite is logically also possible. We believe this illustrates how the combination of, and the interaction between, general and specific policy experiences is the better way to study policy implementation. This approach is, at least, more accurate and realistic than studying them in isolation. As such, this dissertation adopted a bottom-up approach that allows for the study of the broader context of behavior at the frontline. This is in line with, among others, Lipsky (1980), Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003; 2012), Hill and Hupe (2009), Gofen (2014), and Evans (2015).

Our results suggest that frontline workers value policy meaningfulness more highly than powerfulness, as we found that implementation willingness was, apparently, more strongly-related to the former than to the latter. However, it should be noted that this statement should be nuanced based on our study where we adopted an asymmetrical approach to the relationship between powerfulness and implementation willingness (chapter 5). Powerfulness is also important for implementation, yet more as a prerequisite than as a determining factor (Thomann *et al.*, 2018).

Our study, furthermore, indicates that an important driver of alienation, besides policy accumulation, can be policy consistency. Although we did not find support that frontline workers always favored consistency over inconsistency – sometimes they detested a policy so much, they simply want it to be stopped –, our research indicates consistency is, overall, positively valued. This is illustrated by the following quote provided by a teacher in our 2016 survey: "*They are simply not interested in consistency and stability. Each new Minister has his own ideas and immediately gets rid of his predecessor's policies. I simply beg them: stay away from what is going well.*" If frontline workers are continuously confronted with government policies that they do not support, this could make them resistant and to view new policies as just the 'political flavor of the month' (cf. Herold *et al.*, 2007). This is likely to have a negative effect on their implementation willingness and, hence, on successful policy implementation.

However, it should be clear, that we do not argue that policy accumulation and the introduction of new policies is undesirable in itself. Rather, we believe that rapid, inconsistent policy changes may affect how frontline workers perceive and enact policies. In particular, we found a strong relationship between consistency and legitimacy. This suggests that government actions in terms of consistency of public policy may influence the degree to which these actions are perceived as justified and appropriate. Recent studies (for an overview, see Mintrom & Luetjens, 2017) have indicated that discussions of public value have emphasized three important aspects: delivering meaningful services, achieving preferred social outcomes, and maintaining trust and legitimacy. The findings of our study suggest that frontline workers, at least to a certain extent, have the impression that achieving social outcomes (i.e., meaningful policies) and maintaining trust and legitimacy are contested.

To conclude, in terms of policy implementation, policymakers (still) do not always get what they want. Hence, it is not surprising that policy implementation is still one of the main challenges for civil servants worldwide (O'Toole, 2004) and one of the key theoretical and empirical puzzles for public administration scholars (Hupe, 2014; Sandfort & Moulton, 2015; Ansell *et al.*, 2017). This explains the continuing debate in academia and practice on how to account for the complex, messy, and, sometimes, contradictory implementation of public policies (e.g., Young & Lewis, 2015; Algemene Rekenkamer, 2017; Siciliano *et al.*, 2017; Tjeenk Willink, 2017). This study contributes to this debate by further investigating the role of frontline workers, and how they perceive and enact government policies from a bottom-up, historical and quantitative perspective.

6.2 DISCUSSION

6.2.1 Academic contributions

This thesis contributes to policy implementation and street-level bureaucracy literature, scale development in public administration research, and the study of education policy.

Contribution to policy implementation and street-level bureaucracy literature

Street-level bureaucracy research - as well as the strongly connected field of policy implementation research - has evolved since Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) and Lipsky (1980). However, several theoretical and methodological issues continue to exist. These include the specification of the dependent variable (Hupe, 2013), and the problem of the 'too many variables' (Goggin, 1986) on the side of potentially explanatory factors at the strategic, tactical and operational level. It has been noted that to make the study of street-level bureaucracy "both generalizable and comparative" is an issue in its own right (Hupe *et al.*, 2015, p. 376). We aimed with this quantitative study to (partially) solve these disputes, by testing, among others, implementation theories using large datasets.

The first contribution of this study is that we highlighted that frontline workers' policy perceptions should be understood in their historical context. Siciliano

et al. (2017, p. 889) considered this perspective relevant and stated "personal beliefs that frontline workers hold toward a particular policy prior to implementation and the social processes and interactions that influence the formation of those beliefs are areas that have received less attention in research examining frontline bureaucratic behaviors". We developed the concept of general policy alienation to do this building on the work on policy alienation by Tummers, Bekkers, and Steijn (2009; 2011; 2012). In line with these studies, we found that both powerfulness and meaningfulness matter for policy implementation, but – if one has to choose - that meaningfulness seems to be the decisive factor. Furthermore, our study suggests that the combination of general evaluations of government policy and characteristics of the new policy to be implemented is the ultimate combination in explaining implementation willingness – obviously, if combined with other personal, organizational and societal characteristics.

Furthermore, our findings underscore the potential positive impact of policy consistency. This aligns with the literature adopting a rational perspective on policymaking, and the literature emphasizing the status quo bias of frontline workers (e.g., Fleming *et al.* 2010; Arnold & Fleischman, 2013). Our study, although to some extent at odds with the nature of political decision- and policymaking (Hill & Hupe, 2009; Head & Alford, 2015; Beland & Howlett, 2016), suggests that keeping an eye on policy consistency might be a useful strategy for governments to improve public service delivery, via increased policy support among frontline workers. Although frontline workers may not find a specific policy meaningful, or the ultimate way to deal with societal challenges or create public value, they appear to be more likely to support this policy if they know – perhaps from previous experience - that the government is willing and able to maintain this policy over time.

This illustrates an interesting paradox: Although politicians have full democratic and legal authority to introduce inconsistent policies (if, of course, supported by a majority in the House of Representatives), it can make it more difficult for administrators to successfully implement these policies. Interestingly in this regard is a recent study of Olsen (2017), who found that citizens evaluated policymakers more positively by their actions, rather than by their inactions – regardless of the outcome. Changing policy from this point of view is a potentially positive choice of action for policymakers; as it might result in more

positive evaluations of citizens (i.e., potential voters). Changing policy from our study's point of view, is perhaps not always the best option, as it might result in less positive evaluations of frontline workers. Thus, based on these findings, the challenge for politicians and governments seems how to balance these different interests and perspectives when initiating, formulating and implementing their policies (Howlet *et al.*, 2015).

Finally, it should be clear that the aim of our study was not to claim that policies should not be changed. Policies must certainly be flexible enough to adapt to new technologies, changing circumstances and societal developments. For instance, research indicated that 'big data' is here to stay, and will be reflected in policies (Giest, 2017). Besides that, noncompliance of frontline workers, and subsequent governmental responses, should also be understood as a source of policy changes and an interactive, ongoing process, in which noncompliance may gain social acceptance (Gofen, 2015). Thus, policies should be fluid, not rigid. However, inconsistent policies may have negative consequences for policy implementation. This implication of our study highlights a relevant and, as yet, unsolved public administration dilemma, namely: what may be regarded as perfectly legitimate and efficient from a top-down point of view, may be regarded as entirely illegitimate and inefficient from a bottom-up point of view (Sabatier, 1986; Brodkin, 2012; Gofen, 2014; Alon-Barkat & Gilad, 2016).

However, the reality is that public values can only be achieved if governments and frontline workers cooperate and align their interests for society's sake (Bryson *et al.*, 2015). If this is not achieved, and divergent perspectives and behavior arise, core public values are put at risk. Hence, it is crucial that frontline workers adhere to the values of fairness, equality, and equity when implementing policies that were decided upon through democratic procedures (Brehm & Gates, 1999). Governments, on the other hand, have the responsibility to create the circumstances in which frontline workers may do so.

Contribution to scale development in public administration research

Public administration research is becoming increasingly quantitative. As seen in psychological and managerial research, the result is a growing demand for valid and reliable measures. However, it has been noted that the field of public administration lags behind other social sciences (Perry, 2016). This is problematic,

because valid and reliable measures can only be developed by following strict procedures (Smith *et al.*, 2000).

In this study, two measures of general policy alienation were developed and tested, observing stringent criteria. This is important because frontline workers' policy predispositions (i.e., their degree of general policy alienation), as crystallized attitudes, might heavily condition the influence of government behavior on their policy evaluations (cf. Tesler, 2015). By capturing this, our measures acknowledged that frontline workers brought with them a history of government policy (changes) and, hence, general ideas about their effectiveness, legitimacy, equity and manageability. Thus, our measures enabled the application of a typical public administration perspective in change management and policy implementation research (Kuipers *et al.*, 2014). This application was especially relevant in light of the recent increase in public administration studies borrowing and extending theories from the field of psychology, or simply: the rise of the behavioral public administration (Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.*, 2017).

We developed a 26-item measure first and then, second, a short compromised five-item measure, based on the original measure. We conducted analyses on three independent datasets. These showed that the original multidimensional 26-item measure can be abbreviated to a short five-item measure with limited compromises on validity and reliability. Developing such a measure is relatively new to public administration research. We hope that the systematic 10-step approach may help others researchers to develop short versions of other measures in public administration research. This strengthens the quality of quantitative (public administration) research by promoting deliberate short-scale development. This also prevents researchers from creating ad-hoc short measures that makes it difficult to compare research results and impairs the development of a common body of knowledge. We believe this is particularly relevant in light of the notion that the public administration discipline has relatively little 'homegrown' concepts and public administration researchers infrequently develop scales themselves (Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.*, 2017).

Contribution to education policy literature

A significant amount of research, both in educational (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; You *et al.*, 2017) and public administration research (Grissom *et al.*, 2016; Janssen,

2016), has been conducted on the job to assess (dis)satisfaction, burn-out and intention of teachers to leave and to posit factors that potentially explain this. Furthermore, several studies have focused on the question how teachers perceive government policies (Matlock *et al.*, 2016) or how new public management practices take over education systems (Aoki, 2015) and what consequences this might have for teachers. For instance, Matlock *et al.* (2016) studied US teachers' views on the common core state standards (i.e., national standards and assessments) and its implementation, which the authors consider the most significant change in American schools' history. This study particularly aimed to address teachers' views and support toward this policy. They measured these items with an 66-item instrument they developed themselves, where it would have been perfectly possible – given the topic under study – to apply the (general) policy alienation framework. The author is unaware of any systematic framework to analyze general experiences of teachers with government policies. Despite the fact that this could clearly be a relevant contextual factor when studying, for instance, teachers' job satisfaction, burn-out or intention to leave.

Our study convincingly shows how the (general) policy alienation framework can be a fruitful instrument for researchers that investigate education policy, or what consequences education policy might have on day-to-day experiences of teachers, as well as to make better sense of education policy implementation, and how teachers perceive and enact policies. Although the general policy alienation framework was developed within the public administration discipline, we hope also researchers from the education research discipline will find the framework and the 'historical perspective' it adopts useful.

6.2.2 Limitations

As with all studies, this study has limitations. This section discusses three limitations that resulted from methodological choices and choices in the research design.

Selection of case study

The majority of the research presented in this thesis (excluding the sample of healthcare workers we used in chapter 5) was based on data collected in the Dutch secondary education sector. We provided three main arguments as to

why this sector is a relevant case to study general policy alienation, namely: the important role school leaders and teachers play in delivering public services, the fact that there has been a lot of reshuffling of authority between government and schools, and that there has been a large number of policy changes. We expect this to be quite similar in other public sectors where policymakers are heavily dependent on implementing organizations for their policy's success, such as the healthcare or the safety domain where similar implementation challenges have been witnessed (e.g., Gofen, 2015; McDermott *et al.*, 2015).

However, we cannot exclude the fact that specific characteristics of our research context influenced our research results. For instance, it could be that two defining characteristics of the Dutch secondary education sector, namely: the combination of a relatively decentralized sector and the relatively large number of policy changes, has an effect on the degree of general policy alienation we report. It could be that the degree of general policy alienation is lower in relatively centralized education sectors or in sectors where a smaller number of policy changes is introduced – or the other way around. Nevertheless, the assumptions we tested in this thesis are grounded in street-level bureaucracy and policy implementation theory and cohere with the findings of previous studies (e.g., Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Hill & Hupe, 2009; Tummers, 2012). Therefore, although we should be cautious in generalizing our results, we are confident in the results we present in this thesis, namely: that frontline workers experience such a thing as general policy alienation, and that this influences how they perceive and enact newly introduced policies. However, it should be clear that the strength of the relationships we present may be different for, as examples, teachers in the USA or for police officers in the Netherlands.

Causal inference

Not all findings we present in this thesis allow for causal inference. This is not a major problem, given that this is not our main research aim in all empirical chapters. In chapter 4, on the other hand, establishing a causal relationship between policy consistency and policy perceptions was our main research aim. Therefore, we conducted a survey experiment among Dutch teachers to allow us to draw conclusions about causality (James *et al.*, 2017). The results provided support for the hypothesized causal relationship, namely: that policy consistency results in

more policy meaningfulness and stronger government legitimacy. In chapter 2 and 3, where we studied the correlations between policy alienation and related concepts, already we had established initial evidence of such relationships. Yet, our main goal there was not to prove a causal relationship, but rather to study whether our measures behave as they should behave with theoretically (un)related concepts.

Also, in chapter 5, establishing a causal relationship was not our main research aim. What we did was to investigate the motivational effect of policy powerfulness and meaningfulness for implementation willingness from an asymmetric logic. However, our findings do suggest such a causal relationship – or at least, do not exclude such a relationship. Obviously, we urge future research to establish causality for the relationships under study in these chapters. Although it should be clear that, not in all cases and under all circumstances, an experimental approach will be helpful (Van Engen, 2019).

Policy implementation success is not policy success

This study investigated policy implementation and what factors may contribute to successful policy implementation by frontline workers. This is relevant, because if a policy is not implemented, it cannot be evaluated as to whether or not this policy contributes to solving the societal challenges it aims to address. However, it should be noted that successful policy implementation does not equal policy success. Rather, we believe a distinction should be made between political success, policy implementation success and policy success, as proposed by Marsh and McConnell (2010). Although it should be clear that these types of success are (strongly) connected. For instance, in the case of Dutch secondary education, a political success could be that the House of Representatives supports a new policy proposal by the Minister of Education that aims to introduce a new curriculum that has a motivating effect on students and better prepares them for the next step in their school career. Policy implementation success, then, could be that this new curriculum is developed, tested and, ultimately, used in all schools.

Finally, we may consider this policy a success – which is basically only possible if the policy is successfully implemented – if research shows that the new curriculum indeed increases student motivation, as well as proves that students are better prepared for the next step in their school career. Besides that, different

viewpoints exist on what successful policy implementation actually entails. From a governments' perspective, for instance, this may be that frontline workers do exactly what governments want them to do. However, what you see, in terms of formal policy, is not always what you get, in terms of policy-as-produced (Brodkin, 2012). It is important to take these distinctions into account while reflecting on this study's results. At the same time, it suggests interesting avenues for future research.

6.2.3 An agenda for future research

We distinguish three relevant themes for future research based on our study's research findings and implications, as well as the limitations outlined above.

Revival of policy implementation research

First, we urge for a revival of policy implementation research. Policy implementation research, traditionally, was rather qualitative (e.g., Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Lipsky, 1980; Sandfort, 2000, Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Hill & Hupe, 2009). The rise of the 'behavioral public administration' (Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.*, 2017) and the growing focus on quantitative studies and research methods in public administration, opens up interesting opportunities for policy implementation and street-level bureaucracy research (as is illustrated by, among others, Andersen & Jakobsen, 2017; Raaphorst, 2018a; Schott *et al.*, 2018).

In one of the empirical chapters of this study, we conducted a survey experiment, showing how policy consistency may contribute to more policy meaningfulness and more government legitimacy. Another study showed how the majority of frontline workers who experienced high implementation willingness, also experienced high discretion. Hence, our study illustrates how a quantitative approach offers the opportunity to test theoretical propositions drawn from qualitative implementation and street-level bureaucracy research, including, for example, how frontline workers deal with uncertainties related to information and interpretation problems in interacting with citizen-clients (Raaphorst, 2018a), or whether the explicit treatment of public value creation as a policy goal can improve the fit between original policy intentions and the delivery of public services (Mintrom & Luetjens, 2017). We believe this development will bring on policy implementation research further, by complementing macro-level 'grand

implementation theories' with their micro-level underpinnings (Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.*, 2017; Van Engen, 2019).

Relevance of field experiments and multilevel research

Second, we recommend the use of field experiments and multilevel research when studying policy alienation and its consequences for successful policy implementation. Although we used a survey experiment to establish a relationship between policy consistency, discretion and perceived policy meaningfulness and government legitimacy, we would recommend replicating such findings with field or laboratory experiments. The clear advantage of field experiments, as compared to survey experiments, is the real-life context in which ecological validity is naturally guaranteed (Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.*, 2017; James *et al.*, 2017).

We recommend also further study of the link between policy perceptions and actual behavior. The limitations section highlighted how policy implementation success does not equal policy success. The same is true for frontline workers' policy perceptions and their behavior: perceptions do not equal behavior. Although it is generally acknowledged that perceptions affect behavior, and we showed how policy perceptions affect implementation willingness, we cannot be fully sure that - and if so, how - policy alienation influences implementation behavior. This should be studied in the field.

We also believe it would be relevant to study general policy alienation from a multilevel perspective. The literature on organization socialization (e.g., Oberfield, 2010; Hatmaker *et al.*, 2011; Vigoda-Gadot & Beeri, 2012; Teodoro, 2014) suggests that the way frontline workers perceive government policies is influenced by the organization in which they work. What characteristics make organizations – besides organizational leadership and tactical powerlessness, which we study in this thesis – either 'policy welcoming' or 'policy resistant', and are these characteristics manipulable?

Study policy alienation in multiple countries and public domains

Third, we deem it important that general policy alienation is studied in other countries and public sector domains to complement the Dutch secondary education sector studies. Although we are aware that this is not a highly original suggestion, we believe this is important to further develop the policy alienation

concept. As we have witnessed with research on red tape (e.g., Van Loon *et al.*, 2016) or public service motivation (e.g., Kim *et al.*, 2013), it is important that the (general) policy alienation concept is used by public administration scholars world-wide to show its potential added value for our discipline. The replication of our study's findings would improve the general applicability of the results presented in this research. Although we expect our findings to apply to other sectors where policymakers are highly dependent of frontline workers who have significant discretion in doing their work, we have not explicitly tested this. It would improve the feasibility of the general policy alienation concept if future research addressed these concerns. We recommend two particular avenues for future research.

First, we recommend comparative research in different countries to study how general policy alienation may be dependent on the specific education context. How do particular characteristics influence the degree of alienation? For instance, it is known that the Dutch education sector is relatively decentralized (EP-Nuffic, 2015), whereas the education sector in Singapore is relatively centralized (Dimmock & Tan, 2016). It would be relevant to find out if the average general policy alienations scores between teachers working in these countries differ and, if so, how this might be related to the degree of (de)centralization in the sector – as well as other key characteristics, such as initial teacher training programs, salary versus teaching obligations, and the ratio of full-time versus part-time working teachers.

Second, we recommend research in multiple domains in order to study how general policy alienation may be dependent on specific job characteristics. For instance, comparative studies can be conducted in the education, health and safety sector. Do teachers, on average, find government policies more meaningful than nurses? Or, do nurses, on average, more strongly have the idea that they have more or less influence on policy content at the national level than, say, police officers? The ultimate question, then, is how these differences can be explained, including how this may be dependent on job positions (manager, versus middle manager, versus frontline worker) (e.g., Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; May & Winter, 2009; Brodkin, 2011).

6.2.4 Implications for practice

The findings of this study have three main implications for practice.

Learn from the past

First, this study underscores that, in order to more comprehensively understand policy implementation success and failure, attention should be paid to a policy's history. Specifically, we argue that taking frontline workers previous policy experiences into account better explains the (un)successful implementation of new policies. This insight may urge politicians and civil servants, when introducing a new policy – or already when they consider introducing a new policy – to take this history into account from the start. For instance, this awareness may motivate them to evaluate how a new policy aligns or disaligns with previously introduced policies or to estimate whether frontline workers may start to feel 'overwhelmed' by the number of policy changes announced.

Throughout this thesis, we provided several examples of policy implementation failure. It is not a challenging task to find more examples: "Very often, political decisions... are at odds with the implementation possibilities" (Tjeenk Willink, 2017). Our study aimed to contribute to a better understanding of implementation failure and the role frontline workers have in this failure. Ultimately, these insights may contribute to improved policy formulation and implementation processes, as well as more policy alignment.

Deliberately apply consistent policies

Second, this study marks the relevance of policy consistency for frontline workers. Although we do not find support for the statement that policy consistency is always considered the best option from frontline workers' point of view, we do find support for the statement this is a factor frontline workers take into account when evaluating (a series of) policy measures. Our study suggests that policy proposals and changes that follow upon each other quite quickly can have a detrimental effect on policy implementation willingness. It is important that policymakers are aware of this, as this awareness may help them develop a more consistent policy program. Implementing policies is not easy, but usually requires significant effort. If frontline workers can be relatively sure their investment 'is worth it', this may increase their implementation willingness.

Interestingly, our results indicate that frontline workers do not always support the continuation of policies. If frontline workers do not support the content of a policy, they might welcome its abolishment. In our case study, for instance, this was recently the case with the pulling back of an obligatory diagnostic test and the obligatory participation in a so-called register of teachers (Algemeen Dagblad, 2018). A significant number of teachers responded quite positively to these decisions, for instance: "The decision of the Minister of Education is the only correct way... Teachers were not involved in [the register's] development." (NOS, 2018). This is, in a way, understandable, yet, at the same time, increases the likelihood that teachers in the future will adopt a 'wait-and-see attitude'. From that point of view, it might be better for a government's long-term implementation success to continue policies, despite their lack of support among frontline workers, or, perhaps, even when they do not fully align with the responsible Minister's political or policy preferences.

Measure (general) policy alienation in a representative, nation-wide survey

Finally, this study results in two measurement instruments that can be freely used by practitioners to evaluate policy support among frontline workers. Depending on the specific practical issues and research questions at hand, they can apply either the long or the short measure. This may provide relevant information for governments, for instance, on the perceived added value of a policy or whether or not it is relevant to extend the participation opportunities for frontline workers. This will allow politicians, public managers and civil servants to evaluate if and how (general) policy support evolves over time, especially if these measures are used repeatedly over time. If this is combined with the study of the experiences of frontline workers with the implementation of specific new policies (see Tummers, 2012), this will result in insightful information on policy support among frontline workers. This information can be used to refine, replace or abolish policies. We recommend governments in particular to use such surveys to detect frontline workers who, either do not feel alienated from government policies at all, or have very low alienation scores. Our study indicates there are Dutch secondary school teachers who experience little to no policy alienation. We believe it would be interesting to look into the characteristics and experiences of these frontline

workers, because they can be helpful in formulating and framing policies and implementation strategies.

6.3 TO CONCLUDE

In conclusion, this thesis has investigated the relationship between general policy alienation and policy implementation. Our research findings show clearly that both academics and practitioners should pay attention to the fact that frontline workers' are not neutral implementers. They bring with them a history of government (policy) changes that affect how they perceive and behave in relation to new policies. Therefore, we believe a distinction must be made between specific and general policy experiences, as this will help to better understand policy implementation failure – or, ideally, success. Furthermore, our results underscore the potential added value of policy consistency for frontline workers. We show that policy consistency increases perceived policy meaningfulness, as well as government legitimacy. Therefore, it might be a useful strategy for government to improve their policy implementation via more committed implementers. Finally, we shed light on the ongoing discussion on discretion in policy design and implementation research. Our results show that the majority of frontline workers who feel powerful have high implementation willingness. We urge scholars and practitioners to move away from the question as to whether frontline workers should be granted discretion and on to how to best make use of frontline workers' discretion instead.

Our findings obviously are contributing a new angle on the continuing debate within policy implementation and street-level bureaucracy research as to how to account for the complex, messy, and, sometimes, contradictory implementation of public policies.

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APPENDIX I: GENERAL POLICY ALIENATION MEASURES

This Appendix includes the original and short measure of general policy alienation. Five-point Likert scales were used with all the items.

General policy alienation measure (26-item measure)

Table I.1 Overview of general policy alienation items

Dimension		General policy alienation item
Strategic powerlessness	1	In my opinion, <u>professionals</u> have too little power to influence government <u>policies</u>
	2	We, as <u>professionals,</u> are completely powerless during the introduction of government <u>policies</u>
	3	<u>Professionals</u> cannot influence the development of policies at the national level (Minister and Ministry of <u>X,</u> National Government)
	4	On a national level, <u>professionals</u> can influence how <u>policies</u> are set up (R)
	5	<u>Professionals</u>, through their professional associations, actively help in drawing up the design of government <u>policies</u> (R)
	6	Politicians, during the design of <u>policies</u>, do not listen to <u>professionals</u> at all
Tactical powerlessness	7	In my <u>organization</u>, it is especially <u>professionals</u> who decide how government <u>policies</u> are implemented (R)
	8	In my <u>organization</u>, <u>professionals</u> – through working groups or meetings – take part in decisions on executing government <u>policies</u> (R)
	9	The management of my <u>organization</u> should involve <u>professionals</u> far more in the execution of government <u>policies</u>
	10	<u>Professionals</u> are not listened to during the introduction of government <u>policies</u> in my <u>organization</u>
	11	In my <u>organization</u>, <u>professionals</u> take part in conversations regarding the execution of government <u>policies</u> (R)
	12	I and my fellow <u>professionals</u> are completely powerless during the introduction of government <u>policies</u> in my <u>organization</u>
Operational powerlessness	13	Generally, I have freedom to decide how to use government <u>policies</u> (R)
	14	Generally, when working with government <u>policies,</u> I can be in keeping with <u>clients</u>' needs (R)
	15	Generally, working with government <u>policies</u> feels like a harness in which I cannot easily move
	16	Generally, when working with government <u>policies</u>, I have to adhere to tight procedures

	17	Generally, government <u>policies</u> allow me to sufficiently tailor them to the needs of my <u>clients</u>
	18	Generally, government <u>policies</u> allow me to make my own judgments (R)
Societal meaninglessness	19	In general, I think that government <u>policy</u> in the long term will lead to <u>socially relevant goal A</u> (R)
	20	In general, I think that government <u>policy</u> in the short term will lead to <u>socially relevant goal A</u> (R)
	21	In general, I think that government <u>policy</u> has already led to <u>socially relevant goal A</u> (R)
	22	Overall, I think that government <u>policy</u> leads to <u>socially relevant goal A</u> (R)
Client meaninglessness	23	In general, government <u>policy</u> enables me to better solve the problems of my <u>clients</u> (R)
	24	In general, government <u>policy</u> contributes to the welfare of my <u>clients</u> (R)
	25	In general, government <u>policy</u> enables me to help <u>clients</u> more efficiently (R)
	26	Overall, I think government <u>policy</u> is ultimately favorable for my <u>clients</u> (R)

Note: In the present study, the general terms (underlined) are replaced by specifics: <u>professionals</u> by teachers, <u>X</u> by Education, <u>policy(ies)</u> by government education policy(ies), <u>organization</u> by school, <u>clients</u> by students, <u>policy</u> by education policy, <u>socially relevant goal A</u> by higher educational quality

Short measure of general policy alienation (5-item measure)

Table I.2 Overview of general policy alienation items

Item	Template	Present study
1	<u>Professionals</u> cannot influence the development of <u>policies</u> at the national level (Minister and Ministry of <u>X</u>, national government)	School leaders and teachers cannot influence the development of education policies at the national level (Minister and Ministry of Education, national government)
2	Generally, I have freedom to decide how to use government <u>policies</u> (R)	Generally, I have freedom to decide how to use government education policies
3	Overall, I think that government <u>policy</u> leads to <u>socially relevant goal A</u> (R)	Overall, I think that government education policy leads to higher educational quality
4	In general, I think that government <u>policy</u> in the long term will lead to <u>socially relevant goal A</u> (R)	In general, I think that government education policy in the long term will lead to higher educational quality
5	In general, government <u>policy</u> enables me to better solve the problems of my <u>clients</u> (R)	In general, government education policy enables me to better solve the problems of my students

APPENDIX II: 10-STEP PROCEDURE TO DEVELOP SHORT MEASURES

This Appendix provides an overview of the 10-step procedure we used to develop a short measure of general policy alienation. This procedure is mostly based on guidelines and suggestions of DeVellis (2003) and Smith *et al.* (2000).

Table II.1 10-step procedure to develop short measures

Steps	
Preparatory stage	
1	Only develop a short measure of a sufficiently validated original measure
2	Determine clearly what you want to measure
3	Select item pool from original measure
4	Determine whether it is necessary to develop additional items
5	Determine whether it is necessary to change the format for measurement
6	Evaluate face validity: Review item pool with experts
7	Include proposed short measure in a new survey questionnaire
Analysis stage (evaluate proposed measure)	
8	Show internal consistency reliability
9	Show construct validity a) Convergent b) Discriminant
10	Determine final measure
Optional	Repeat steps 4-10 if the analysis stage does not provide satisfactory or easy to interpret results

APPENDIX III: EXPERIMENT (TRANSLATED FROM DUTCH TO ENGLISH)

Upon accepting the invitation to participate, respondents were randomly assigned one of the two policies and, subsequently, one of the two possible response options.

Policy 1

Please imagine that Sander Dekker, the current Dutch Secretary of State for Education, decided in 2016 that schools, from school year 2016-2017 onwards, should receive additional funding for professional development. Schools are free to decide how to spend these funds to improve the quality of education (for instance on courses, advanced electronic equipment or supplementary educational support). This is because research has shown that it is necessary that educational staff (school leaders and teachers) professionalize. One of the reasons why professional development was stagnating was that there was insufficient funding available for schools.

In 2017, a new government is inaugurated. The new Secretary of State for Education is [name[4]].

One of the first debates that [name] has in the House of Representatives is about the budget for professional development in the education sector. During this debate, a Member of the House of Representatives states that:

"I believe that schools should not receive a fixed professional development budget that they can spend how they like. I feel it is the government's task to decide where professional development is most strongly needed and which programs should be offered to and financed for schools. We cannot leave this to the schools' discretion. Therefore, I propose that you immediately stop offering these funds to schools."

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4   We used common Dutch names; not the name of a real politician.

Next, the new Secretary of State responds:

<u>Response 1(indicating policy consistency)</u>
"Chairman, it has been proposed to abolish the professional development budget. However, this measure was only introduced by my predecessor in the last school year. Therefore, we do not yet know whether this measure will have the desired effect. Hence, it seems illogical to already abolish it. The policy will therefore be maintained."

<u>Response 2 (indicating policy inconsistency)</u>
"Chairman, it has been proposed to abolish the professional development budget. However, this measure was only introduced by my predecessor in the last school year. Therefore, we do not yet know whether this measure will have the desired effect. Nevertheless, I agree that it seems preferable to abolish it. The policy will therefore not be maintained."

Policy 2

Please imagine that Sander Dekker, the current Dutch Secretary of State for Education, decided in 2016 that a fixed percentage of schools, from school year 2016-2017, should be [type A[5]] schools. This measure applies to both new and existing secondary schools. This is because research by the Dutch Inspectorate of Education has shown that education inequality is increasing. One of the causes is the increase in the number of [type B] schools and a decrease in the number of [type A] schools.

In 2017 a new government is inaugurated. The new Secretary of State for Education is [name].

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5   Type A schools offer all three levels of secondary education (ranging from vocational training to pre-university education); type B schools only offer one level of secondary education. This implies that type B schools will be less diverse and that it will be harder for students to switch between levels, an ability which is particularly relevant in terms of educational opportunities for students at the lowest level.

One of the first debates that [name] has in the House of Representatives is about the equality measure. During this debate, a Member of the House of Representatives states that:

"I believe that schools should be free to decide what type of school they want to be. I feel that the current measure restricts the freedom of education. We can leave this to the schools' discretion. Therefore, I propose you immediately stop this equality measure."

Next, the new Secretary of State responds:

Response 1 (indicating policy consistency)
"Chairman, it has been proposed to abolish the equality measure. However, this measure was only introduced by my predecessor in the last school year. Therefore, we do not yet know whether this measure will have the desired effect. Hence, it seems illogical to already abolish it. The policy will therefore be maintained."

Response 2 (indicating policy inconsistency)
"Chairman, it has been proposed to abolish the equality measure. However, this measure was only introduced by my predecessor in the last school year. Therefore, we do not yet know whether this measure will have the desired effect. Nevertheless, I agree that it seems preferable to abolish it. The policy will therefore not be maintained."

APPENDIX IV: OVERVIEW OF ALL OTHER MEASURES USED

This Appendix complements Appendix I and includes all the other measures used in this study. Please note that templates are used in some measures (underlined words). Templates allow researchers to adapt items to their specific situation by replacing general phrases with more specific ones: ones that fit the context of their research. All items are formatted as five-point Likert scales, unless otherwise stated.

Discretion (i.e., operational powerfulness) (Van Engen *et al.*, 2016)

1. Generally, I have freedom to decide how to use government policies
2. Generally, when working with government policies, I can be in keeping with clients' needs
3. Generally, working with government policies feels like a harness in which I cannot easily move (R)
4. Generally, government policies allow me to sufficiently tailor them to the needs of my clients

Implementation willingness (Tummers, 2012, based on Metselaar, 1997)

1. I try to convince colleagues of the benefits that government policies will bring
2. I reduce resistance among colleagues regarding government policies
3. I make time to implement government policies
4. I make an effort to implement government policies successfully

Legitimacy (cf. De Fine Licht, 2014)

1. What do you think of the decision of the new Secretary of State?
2. How willing are you to accept the decision of the new Secretary of State?
3. How likely do you think it is that you will protest against the decision of the new Secretary of State? (R)

Policy alienation (Tummers, 2012)

Strategic powerlessness
1. In my opinion, professionals had too little power to influence the policy

2. We <u>professionals</u> were completely powerless during the introduction of the <u>policy</u>
3. <u>Professionals</u> could not at all influence the development of the <u>policy</u> at the national level (Minister and Ministry of <u>X</u>, National Government)
4. On a national level, <u>professionals</u> could influence how the <u>policy</u> was set up (R)
5. <u>Professionals</u>, through their professional associations, actively helped to think with the design of the <u>policy</u> (R)
6. Politicians did not, during the design of the <u>policy</u>, listen to the <u>professionals</u> at all

Tactical powerlessness
1. In my <u>organization</u>, especially <u>professionals</u> could decide how the <u>policy</u> was to be implemented (R)
2. In my <u>organization</u>, <u>professionals</u> have, through working groups or meetings, taken part in decisions on the execution of the <u>policy</u> (R)
3. The management of my <u>organization</u> should have involved the <u>professionals</u> far more in the execution of the <u>policy</u>
4. <u>Professionals</u> were not listened to over the introduction of the <u>policy</u> in my <u>organization</u>
5. In my <u>organization</u>, <u>professionals</u> could take part in discussions regarding the execution of the <u>policy</u> (R)
6. I and my fellow <u>professionals</u> were completely powerless in the introduction of the <u>policy</u> in my <u>organization</u>

Operational powerlessness (discretion)
1. I have freedom to decide how to use the <u>policy</u> (R)
2. While working with the <u>policy</u>, I can be in keeping with the <u>client's</u> needs (R)
3. Working with the <u>policy</u> feels like I am in a harness in which I cannot easily move
4. When I work with the <u>policy</u>, I have to adhere to tight procedures
5. While working with the <u>policy</u>, I cannot sufficiently tailor it to the needs of my <u>clients</u>
6. While working with the <u>policy</u>, I can make my own judgments (R)

Societal meaninglessness

1. I think that the <u>policy</u>, in the long term, will lead to <u>goal X</u> (R)
2. I think that the <u>policy</u>, in the short term, will lead to <u>goal X</u> (R)
3. I think that the <u>policy</u> has already led to <u>goal X</u>(R)
4. Overall, I think that the <u>policy</u> leads to <u>goal X</u> (R)

Please note that in chapter 4, only item 1, 2 and 4 were used.

Client meaninglessness

1. With the <u>policy</u> I can better solve the problems of my <u>clients</u> (R)
2. The <u>policy</u> is contributing to the welfare of my <u>clients</u> (R)
3. Because of the <u>policy</u>, I can help <u>clients</u> more efficiently than before (R)
4. I think that the <u>policy</u> is ultimately favorable for my <u>clients</u> (R)

Policy consistency (Van Engen *et al.*, 2016)

To what extent do you have the impression that policy by the Ministry of <u>X</u>

1. … is consistent
2. … focuses on the long term
3. … is driven by 'the issues of the day' (R)
4. … expresses long-term vision

Transformational leadership (Carless *et al.*, 2000)

My leader….

1. …communicates a clear and positive vision of the future [vision]
2. …treats staff as individuals, supports and encourages their development [staff development]
3. …gives encouragement and recognition to staff [supportive leadership]
4. …fosters trust, involvement and cooperation among team members [empowerment]
5. …encourages thinking about problems in new ways and questions assumptions [innovative thinking]
6. …is clear about his/her values and practises what he/she preaches [lead by example]

7. ...instills pride and respect in others and inspires me by being highly competent [charisma]

Trust in government (cf. European Social Survey)

How much trust do you have in the following institutions/authorities?

1. The Minister and Secretary of State for <u>X</u>
2. The Ministry of <u>X</u>
3. Politics in general

Please note we used a four-point Likert scale to measure trust in government.

Control variables

Age

Year of birth [xxxx]

Gender

Are you...[male, female, other]

Tenure

How long have you been working as a teacher/school leader [xx]

SUMMARY

How Previous Policy Experiences Affect the Frontline: Understanding implementation success and failure through a general policy alienation lens

Introduction

Teachers, healthcare workers and police, as well as other public employees working at 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. 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. However, it can influence the way in which frontline workers perform their tasks, as grown practices may be challenged – over and over again. In this study, we aimed to capture this process and its effect with the concept of general policy alienation, thereby drawing on the policy alienation work by Tummers, Bekkers and Steijn.

It is not bold to state that policymakers are highly dependent on frontline workers for the successful implementation and - perhaps a bit more controversially - the formulation of their policies. Repeated research has shown that actual behavior during policy implementation does not necessarily align with policymakers' ambitions in as much as that a frontline worker might 'shirk or sabotage'. In this study, we provide several examples of frontline workers' responding just like this, for example, by starting a strike or by simply ignoring new policies - 'bend over, here it comes again'. This is problematic because such actions, ultimately, might result in a diminished legitimacy of the government. It can cause tension and conflicts and result in suboptimal circumstances for society at large. This is particularly the case if public funds are invested in the formulation and implementation of government policies that, apparently, are not supported by frontline workers. Ultimately, this impedes the improvement of public service provision, as this is more likely to be achieved if actors operating at different levels of the system collaborate.

Therefore, it is important to understand how frontline workers perceive and implement these policies. Surprisingly, the experiences of frontline workers with

new policies are often studied in isolation and ignore the fact that these policies are never developed in a vacuum. These experiences always have a history because they build on earlier experiences with other related policies. We describe this process as policy accumulation, i.e. the continuous aggregation of policies that follow each other. This suggests that frontline workers have a certain policy predisposition and a general attitude towards government policies, which we refer to as 'general policy alienation'. Drawing on change management studies – where terms such as change fatigue and change cynicism are used – we argue that frontline workers, when confronted with policies they perceive as being introduced too frequently and too inconsistently, could become indifferent to whatever new policy is introduced and result in them viewing new policies as just the new 'political flavor of the month'.

The policy alienation framework was developed to analyze frontline workers' experiences with specific government policies systematically and coherently. Policy alienation is defined as a "cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the policy...". However, as we argue above, it is not only relevant to investigate how frontline workers experience specific policies, but also how they identify with government policies in general. The current policy alienation framework does not take into account the effect of the accumulation of previous experiences and it does not allow for the evaluation of general government experiences. Therefore, we investigated how we could further develop the framework to take this effect into account. This allowed us to investigate what factors influenced general policy alienation, as well as the influence of general policy alienation on implementation willingness. In doing so, we introduced the term general policy alienation.

In summary, 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 might be for policy implementation. 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?

Case study: Dutch secondary education

Our study investigated the education sector. Research has indicated that school leaders and teachers in this sector have experienced many problems with national education policies. This is particularly relevant because they play a crucial role in delivering services. The specific case we studied was the Dutch secondary education sector. This case was relevant for three reasons. First, the sector had experienced many problems in recent decades as a result of the reshuffling of authority and responsibilities between the ministerial and the school levels. Second, the sector was characterized by numerous policy changes. Third, research has shown that many school leaders and teachers are critical of government-initiated reform. This made 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 quote from a school leader we interviewed: "*Annoying are the continuous change 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 implement them loyally you eventually start thinking: Why would we?*"

Main research findings

In **chapter 2**, we report how we adapted the policy alienation framework to allow for the assessment of frontline workers' general experiences with government policies. So far, the policy alienation framework has been used mainly to analyze frontline workers' experiences with single policies. However, a complete picture is only provided if we take the effect of general policy experiences into account and if we allow for the fact that policies are not developed in a vacuum, but rather during a process of policy accumulation. Therefore, we focus on general policy alienation. Do frontline workers have the impression that, in general, they can influence the shaping of government policies? Furthermore, do they have the impression that government policies, overall, are meaningful and add value for society as a whole and their own clients? We define general policy alienation as an overall disconnect from government policies; in other words, a lack of com-

mitment, enthusiasm and identification with policies. As with specific policy alienation, general policy alienation can be conceptualized using five dimensions. This is summarized in Table S.1.

Table S.1 Definition of general policy alienation: five dimensions

Dimension	Definition
Strategic powerlessness	The influence that frontline workers usually perceive themselves as having on decisions concerning the content of government policies as captured in rules and regulations.
Tactical powerlessness	The influence that frontline workers usually perceive themselves as having on decisions concerning the way (new) government policies are implemented within their organization.
Operational powerlessness	The influence that frontline workers usually perceive themselves as having during the actual implementation of government policies.
Societal meaninglessness	The perception of frontline workers concerning the added value of government policy to socially relevant goals.
Client meaninglessness	The perception of frontline workers concerning the added value of government policy for their own clients.

Furthermore, using a sample of 1.096 Dutch teachers, we developed a valid and reliable five dimension, 26-item measure of general policy alienation. An overview of this scale is provided in Appendix I. Our analyses show that the average score on general policy alienation is 3.46 on a 1 to 5 scale and that teachers score particularly high on the strategic powerlessness and the two meaninglessness dimensions. The results show that general policy alienation was positively related to the alienation towards a specific policy program and negatively related to policy consistency, implementation willingness, and transformational leadership. Furthermore, we found that policy consistency was strongly related with strategic powerlessness and meaninglessness. Finally, we found that the meaningfulness of policy (for both society and clients), apparently, had more influence on implementation willingness than perceived powerfulness.

In **chapter 3**, we report how we developed a short measure of general policy alienation, based on the original 26-item measure. This approach produces important benefits. First, the reduced data requirement for a short measure saves survey time that a researcher can now use to measure additional variables. Second, many items that tap into the same concept may introduce fatigue or induce

boredom among respondents. Third, a short measure is more likely to be applied in other fields of public administration, where it could form a relevant contextual or explanatory variable. In order to establish a valid and reliable measure, we developed a 10-step approach for short-scale development that may be useful to researchers wishing to develop short measures themselves. An overview of this procedure is provided in Appendix II. Using three samples of, in total, 2.470 school leaders and teachers, we developed a short, five-item measure of general policy alienation modeled as a second-order construct. An overview of this scale is provided in Appendix I. Our analyses indicate the short version of the scale is a good substitute for the long scale, as we show that, as with the long version of the scale, general policy alienation was negatively related to the perceived meaningfulness of specific policy programs, policy consistency and implementation willingness. Furthermore, we found a negative relationship with trust in government and – perhaps a bit surprising – that general policy alienation appears to be unrelated to school characteristics, such as size and type of school.

In **chapter 4**, we report on a survey experiment we conducted to evaluate the effect of policy consistency on frontline workers perceptions of government and government policies. We argue that policy accumulation is, in itself, not problematic, but becomes problematic when policies are perceived as inconsistent. This assumption is based on literature that emphasizes the relevance of rational policymaking and the status quo biases of frontline workers. Specifically, we investigated how policy consistency – the degree to which policies are stable and constant over time – may improve policy meaningfulness (the added perceived added value of policies) and government legitimacy (how justified and appropriate government action is). From the literature, it is known that discretion during policy implementation is important for frontline workers. Therefore, we also investigated how the effect of policy consistency was influenced by perceived discretion. Using a sample of 779 teachers, we showed that policy consistency had, as expected, a positive effect on meaningfulness and, particularly, legitimacy. Furthermore, we found that this effect was moderated by the degree of autonomy frontline workers experience. Finally, we show that policy consistency was not a one-size-fits-all-solution, as the relationship between consistency,

meaningfulness and legitimacy is influenced by the type of policy respondents are confronted with.

In **chapter 5**, we report how we investigated the motivating effect of powerfulness (i.e. 'perceived discretion') for implementation willingness. We argue that, despite the fact that the topic of discretion continues to be hotly debated in policy design and policy implementation, there has been little systematic research into how the experience of having discretion motivates frontline workers to implement a policy. In this specific study, in contrast to the other studies in this thesis, we relied on an asymmetric explanation of frontline workers motivation. We hypothesized the existence of two complementary interpretations of the motivational role of powerfulness. The first assumed that powerfulness is quasi-necessary, although, on its own, not sufficient to motivate employees. The second interpretation was that powerfulness is only motivating when frontline workers perceive the policy to be implemented as meaningful. Using two samples of 1.317 healthcare workers and 1.096 teachers and large-N set-theoretic analysis, we show that powerfulness is – as expected – a quasi-necessary condition for high implementation willingness. Furthermore, we found mixed evidence for the assumption that a lack of powerfulness was quasi-sufficient for low implementation willingness. Finally, we show that, in combination with policy meaningfulness, powerfulness was quasi-sufficient for high implementation willingness. In other words: feeling powerful is necessary for high implementation willingness, but it is only sufficient in explaining implementation willingness when in combination with meaningfulness. These results underscore the potential added value of studying the relation between policy alienation and implementation willingness, both from an asymmetric and a symmetric perspective.

Why is it relevant to investigate this?

Our studies have contributed to the theoretical knowledge on policy implementation and street-level bureaucracy. Although the literature recognizes the important role of frontline workers for policy implementation, public administration and management research has and still tends to marginalize the perspectives and experiences of those who enact the policy in practice and, particularly, the micro-level (psychological) underpinnings of this. This is peculiar, since policy

implementation is sometimes complex, contradictory, and still one of the main challenges for civil servants worldwide.

Our first contribution was that we introduced the new 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. We emphasized that frontline workers were and are not neutral implementers. By studying policy experiences in relation to their historical context, we extend the theoretical work on policy accumulation and related concepts, such as policy succession and institutional layering.

Our second contribution is that we provided a straightforward suggestion on how to improve frontline workers policy perceptions. It has been noted "the cataloguing of failures when putting policies in place has been the hallmark of implementation studies since the 1970s". We, on the other hand, proposed and showed that policy consistency may contribute to improved policy perceptions of frontline workers by relying on work emphasizing the benefits of a rational policymaking perspective, as well as mostly political research on status quo bias of civil servants.

We aimed to contribute methodologically, by adopting relatively new and innovative methodological approaches. First, we conducted quantitative street-level bureaucracy, implementation research. Traditionally, this type of research has been quite qualitatively oriented. 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". Our quantitative approach allowed for the large-scale testing of relevant theories and assumptions. For instance, we adopted an experimental approach in investigating the effects of policy consistency on frontline workers' policy perceptions. Although experiments, by definition, 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. By doing so, we contributed to the emerging tradition of a ´behavioral public administration´, which operates at the cross-point of public administration and psychology. It is relevant that street-level bureaucracy research is part of this development.

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 other social sciences in the development of measurement scales. We proposed and used systematic procedures that we hope can help other researchers develop scales themselves. This can help street-level bureaucracy and implementation research in making inferences that are also comparable across studies and contexts.

From a more practical point of view, our research may help national and local policymakers – basically, all (government) actors involved in policy implementation – better understand why the implementation of their policies succeeds or fails. This will apply particularly to those sectors when governments are heavily dependent on frontline workers to achieve their intended policy changes. This includes the healthcare sector (where governments rely on medical doctors and nurses), safety sector (where government rely on police and military), and the education sector (where governments rely on school board governors, school leaders and teachers).

Second, we developed measurement scales for use 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 may help to improve the policy implementation process. By taking the experiences of frontline workers seriously, this may be a helpful tool to improve the relationship between policymakers and policy implementers.

Third, the practical recommendations we postulated – based on our research results – provide straightforward suggestions for civil servants and public managers who aim to strengthen their policy implementation. For instance, based on experimental evidence, we underscored the importance of policy consistency for successful policy implementation. Furthermore, we showed that the overwhelming majority of those frontline workers with high implementation willingness also experienced high levels of discretion. This should encourage practitioners interested in implementation, policy and organization design to move beyond

the question as to whether frontline workers should be granted discretion. Based on this study, the more salient question seems to be how to make best use of frontline workers' discretion to encourage behavior that eventually contributes to the achievement of policy goals.

Conclusions

In concluding this study, we can see we investigated the relationship between general policy alienation and policy implementation. Our research findings strongly suggest that governments should pay attention to the fact that frontline workers are not neutral implementers. They bring with them a history of government (policy) changes that affects how they perceive and behave in relation to new policies.

Therefore, we believe it is relevant to distinguish between specific and general policy experiences, as this will help to better understand policy implementation failure – or, more ideally, success. Our results underscored the potential added value of policy consistency for frontline workers. We showed that policy consistency increases perceived policy meaningfulness, as well as government legitimacy. Therefore, it might be a useful strategy for government to improve their policy implementation, via more committed implementers. Finally, we shed light on the ongoing discussion on discretion in policy design and implementation research. Our results showed that the majority of frontline workers who felt powerful had high implementation willingness. We urge scholars and practitioners to move from the question whether frontline workers should be granted discretion as to how to best make use of frontline workers' discretion instead.

Our findings have contributed a new angle to the continuing debate within policy implementation and street-level bureaucracy research on how to account for the complex, messy and, sometimes, contradictory implementation of public policies.

SAMENVATTING

Hoe eerdere beleidservaringen de frontlinie beïnvloeden: Beleidsimplementatie en -mislukking vanuit een algemeen beleidsvervreemdingsperspectief

Introductie

Leraren, verpleegkundigen en de politie, die in de 'frontlinie' verantwoordelijk zijn voor het leveren van publieke diensten, worden regelmatig geconfronteerd met nieuw overheidsbeleid. Dit beleid heeft over het algemeen als gevolg dat ze nieuwe regels, voorschriften en processen moeten implementeren. Dit is op zichzelf staand natuurlijk niet problematisch: democratisch verkozen overheden hebben het volste recht nieuw beleid te introduceren – mits zij hiervoor natuurlijk voldoende steun in het parlement vergaren. Echter, de continue introductie van nieuw beleid beïnvloedt wel de wijze waarop 'frontliniemedewerkers' hun werk doen, aangezien ingesleten gedachtepatronen en gedrag worden uitgedaagd of betwist en nieuw beleid over het algemeen om proactieve inzet van hun kant vraagt om de uitvoering tot een succes te maken.

Het is namelijk keer op keer aangetoond dat politici en beleidsmakers voor de implementatie van hun beleid sterk afhankelijk zijn frontliniemedewerkers. Maar het gedrag van frontliniemedewerkers bij beleidsimplementatie sluit niet per definitie aan bij de ambities van politici en beleidsmakers. In dit proefschrift zijn meerdere voorbeelden beschreven waarin frontliniemedewerkers beleid tegenwerken, door stakingen, door niet in de geest van beleid te handelen of beleid simpelweg niet uit voeren ('*bend over, here it comes again*'). Op deze manier kunnen ze grote uitdagingen creëren voor overheden die beleid willen veranderen en introduceren. Dit is problematisch, omdat deze acties uiteindelijk de legitimiteit van beleid kunnen aantasten, of resulteren in conflicten of onwenselijke maatschappelijke uitkomsten. Dit beïnvloedt de publieke dienstverlening negatief, aangezien bewezen is dat deze verbetert naarmate diverse actoren actief op verschillende niveaus beter samenwerken. Daarom is het belangrijk om nog beter te begrijpen hoe frontliniemedewerkers overheidsbeleid ervaren en implementeren.

Opvallend is dat eerder onderzoek naar de ervaringen van frontliniemedewerkers met overheidsbeleid vaak negeert dat overheidsbeleid niet ontwikkeld wordt in een vacuüm. Eerder is het zo dat de beleidservaringen van frontliniemedewerkers een 'verleden' hebben, omdat ze afhankelijk zijn van hun eerdere ervaringen met ander overheidsbeleid. We refereren aan dit proces als beleidsaccumulatie: de continue opeenstapeling van overheidsbeleid. Dit suggereert dat frontliniemedewerkers een bepaalde beleidspredispositie hebben: een meer positieve of negatieve basishouding jegens beleid. Geïnspireerd door managementstudies die 'verandermoeheid' en 'verandercynisme' onderzoeken, beargumenteren we dat frontliniemedewerkers die te vaak geconfronteerd worden met nieuw beleid dat ze bovendien als inconsequent en zwalkend ervaren, onverschillig en cynisch zijn richting nieuw beleid. Dat beleid beschouwen ze, in hun eigen woorden, simpelweg als het nieuwe politieke of ambtelijke stokpaardje.

Om de ervaringen van frontliniemedewerkers met specifiek overheidsbeleid te analyseren, ontwikkelden Tummers, Bekkers en Steijn het model van beleidsvervreemding. Beleidsvervreemding definiëren ze als "een cognitieve staat van psychologische ontkoppeling met het beleid...". Echter is het, zoals we hierboven beargumenteren, niet alleen relevant de specifieke ervaringen, maar ook de algemene ervaringen van frontliniemedewerkers met overheidsbeleid te analyseren. Bij het overslaan van dit laatste, is het lastiger te begrijpen waarom de implementatie van nieuw beleid mislukt. Het door Tummers *et al.* ontwikkelde model richt zich echter niet op die algemene ervaringen. Daarom onderzoeken we in dit proefschrift of en hoe het mogelijk is dit model zo door te ontwikkelen dat dit wel kan. We introduceren hierbij de term en het model algemene beleidsvervreemding om te refereren aan de algemene ervaringen met beleid die centraal staan. Dit maakt het mogelijk te onderzoeken welke factoren algemene beleidsvervreemding beïnvloeden en welk effect algemene beleidsvervreemding heeft op de implementatiebereidheid van frontliniemedewerkers en hun ervaringen met specifiek beleid. Samenvattend is de hoofdvraag van dit onderzoek:

Hoe kunnen we de algemene beleidsvervreemding van frontliniemedewerkers conceptualiseren en meten, wat zijn de oorzaken van algemene beleidsvervreemding en welk effect heeft het op hun implementatiebereidheid?

Onderzoekscasus: Nederlandse voortgezet onderwijs

De casus die in dit onderzoek centraal staat is het Nederlandse onderwijs. Onderzoek toont aan dat schoolleiders en leraren in deze sector in het heden en verleden diverse problemen met nationaal overheidsbeleid hebben ervaren. Dit is bijzonder relevant, omdat schoolleiders en leraren een cruciale rol spelen bij het leveren van kwalitatief hoogstaand onderwijs. De specifieke onderzoekscasus is het Nederlandse voortgezet onderwijs, die om drie redenen relevant is. Ten eerste hebben actoren in deze sector diverse problemen ervaren als gevolg van het regelmatig herschikken van verantwoordelijkheden tussen het ministerie en het niveau van de school en/of het schoolbestuur. Ten tweede kenmerkt de sector zich door een vrij grote hoeveelheid aan beleidswijzigingen. Ten derde heeft onderzoek laten zien dat veel schoolleiders en leraren in het voortgezet onderwijs kritisch zijn op door de overheid geïnitieerde onderwijshervormingen. Dit maakt het een interessante casus om uitdagingen omtrent beleidsimplementatie, de consequenties van beleidsaccumulatie en oorzaken en effecten van algemene beleidsvervreemding te onderzoeken. De volgende quote afkomstig uit een interview met een schoolleider illustreert dit: *"Wat irritant is, zijn de continue wijzigingen en extra taken. Een perfect voorbeeld is de introductie van de maatschappelijke stage voor alle leerlingen in het voortgezet onderwijs. We omarmden dit beleid, investeerden er veel tijd en geld in en zagen echt de toegevoegde waarde. Vervolgens werd besloten dat de maatschappelijke stage niet verplicht was en waren er ook geen financiële middelen meer beschikbaar. Dit beloont in mijn optiek scholen die laks handelen. De consequentie hiervan is wel dat ik bij nieuw beleid van de overheid dat je in principe loyaal wil implementeren toch begin te denken: Waarom zou ik?"*

Kern van de onderzoeksbevindingen

In **hoofdstuk 2** beschrijven we hoe we het model van beleidsvervreemding zo aanpassen dat we ook de algemene ervaringen van frontliniemedewerkers ermee kunnen analyseren: het model van algemene beleidsvervreemding. Bij het originele model is het namelijk alleen mogelijk de specifieke ervaringen met overheidsbeleid te analyseren, terwijl we in dit proefschrift nu juist aantonen dat een compleet beeld alleen verkregen wordt indien we ook naar meer algemene ervaringen kijken. Kortom, we onderzoeken in hoeverre frontliniemedewerkers,

in ons geval schoolleiders en leraren, het idee hebben dat ze overheidsbeleid kunnen beïnvloeden en of ze over het algemeen de indruk hebben dat beleid van toegevoegde waarde is voor hun eigen cliënten (in dit geval: leerlingen) en de samenleving als geheel. We definiëren algemene beleidsvervreemding als "een algemene staat van psychologische ontkoppeling met overheidsbeleid", oftewel: een gebrek aan betrokkenheid, enthousiasme en identificatie met overheids- beleid. Ook laten we zien dat algemene beleidsvervreemding uit vijf dimensies bestaat. Een beknopte definitie van de vijf dimensies is weergegeven in Tabel S.2. Daarnaast ontwikkelen we op basis van data van 1.096 leraren een gevalideerd meetinstrument van 26 items. Het meetinstrument is weergegeven in Appendix I. Uit de analyses blijkt dat de gemiddelde score op algemene beleidsvervreem- ding 3.46 is op een schaal van 1 tot 5 en dat leraren met name hoog scoren op de dimensies strategische machteloosheid en zinloosheid voor de samenleving en eigen cliënten. We laten zien dat algemene beleidsvervreemding – in lijn met onze hypotheses – positief samenhangt met specifieke ervaringen met beleid en negatief samenhangt met beleidsconsistentie, implementatiebereidheid en transformationeel leiderschap. Daarnaast valt op dat strategische machteloos- heid en zinloosheid sterk samenhangen met beleidsconsistentie. En, tot slot, dat de zinvolheid van beleid (voor samenleving én cliënt) meer invloed heeft op implementatiebereidheid dan gepercipieerde invloed op beleid.

Tabel S.2 Definities van de vijf dimensies van algemene beleidsvervreemding

Dimensie	Definitie
Strategische machteloosheid	De mate van ervaren invloed van frontliniemedewerkers op de inhoud van het beleid, zoals vastgesteld in wet- en regelgeving
Tactische machteloosheid	De mate van ervaren invloed van frontliniemedewerkers op de manier waarop hun organisatie het beleid implementeert
Operationele machteloosheid	De mate van ervaren invloed van frontliniemedewerkers op de manier waarop zij zelf het beleid uitvoeren
Zinloosheid voor de samenleving	De ervaring van de frontliniemedewerkers over de toegevoegde waarde van het beleid aan belangrijke doelen voor de samenleving
Zinloosheid voor de eigen cliënten	De ervaring van de frontliniemedewerkers over de toegevoegde waarde van het beleid voor hun eigen cliënten

In **hoofdstuk 3** ontwikkelen we een korte schaal van algemene beleidsvervreemding, die vijf items telt in plaats van 26 items. Dit is om drie redenen relevant. Ten eerste creëert dit ruimte in surveyonderzoek om andere relevante variabelen te meten. Ten tweede vermoeien veel vragen die min of meer over hetzelfde onderwerp of concept gaan respondenten snel. Ten derde is de kans groter dat onderzoekers deze schaal meenemen in hun eigen onderzoek, bijvoorbeeld als onafhankelijke, contextuele of controlevariabele. We ontwerpen een systematische procedure van 10 stappen om een korte schaal te ontwikkelen, die hopelijk ook voor andere onderzoekers die korte schalen willen ontwikkelen een instrument van toegevoegde waarde is. Deze procedure is weergeven in Appendix II. Voor het ontwikkelen van de schaal maken we gebruik van drie datasets van in totaal 2.470 schoolleiders en leraren. De analyses tonen aan dat een 5-item schaal, gemodelleerd als een tweede-orde-construct het meest geschikt is. Onze analyses laten zien dat de korte schaal een goede vervanger is van de lange schaal, aangezien we ook bij deze analyses vinden dat algemene beleidsvervreemding negatief samenhangt met de zinvolheid van specifiek overheidsbeleid, beleidsconsistentie en implementatiebereidheid. Daarnaast laten we ook de negatieve samenhang met vertrouwen in de overheid zien en – in zekere zin verrassend – dat algemene beleidsvervreemding niet lijkt samen te hangen met schoolspecifieke kenmerken zoals als aantal leerlingen en het type school (openbaar versus bijzonder onderwijs).

In **hoofdstuk 4** beschrijven we het ontwerp en de resultaten van een surveyexperiment dat we uitvoerden om de effecten van beleidsconsistentie nader te onderzoeken. Hier beargumenteren we dat beleidsaccumulatie op zichzelf niet problematisch is, maar dit pas wordt indien beleid wordt gezien als inconsistent. Specifiek onderzoeken we hoe beleidsconsistentie – de mate waarin beleid stabiel en constant is – kan bijdragen aan meer zinvolheid van beleid (beleid met toegevoegde waarde) en meer legitimiteit van de overheid (hoe gerechtvaardigd en passend overheidsoptreden is). Dit doen we op basis van een experiment waarbij we het type beleid waarmee respondenten geconfronteerd worden manipuleren (beleid dat zich richt op professionele ontwikkeling van leraren versus beleid dat zich richt op gelijke onderwijskansen), en ook de mate van consistentie van het handelen van de bewindspersoon in casu (consistent of

inconsistent, oftewel: stopt een nieuw bewindspersoon beleid van zijn voorganger of niet). Op basis van onderzoeksdata van 779 leraren tonen we aan dat beleidsconsistentie, conform verwachting, een positief effect heeft op zinvolheid en, in het bijzonder, legitimiteit. We laten ook zien dat dit effect afhankelijk is van de mate waarin ze autonomie in hun werkzaamheden ervaren. Tot slot laten we zien dat beleidsconsistentie geen 'one-size-fits-all'-oplossing is, aangezien de relatie tussen consistentie en zinvolheid en legitimiteit beïnvloed wordt door het type beleid waarmee respondenten geconfronteerd worden.

In **hoofdstuk 5** onderzoeken we het motiverende effect van ervaren invloed op beleid ('powerfulness'; discretie) op implementatiebereidheid. We doen dit omdat ondanks het continue debat over het belang van discretie, er weinig systematisch onderzoek is naar het motiverende effect hiervan. We adopteren hierbij, in tegenstelling tot de andere studies in dit proefschrift, een asymmetrische aanpak. In deze specifieke casus bedoelen we hiermee dat we een ander effect verwachten van de aanwezig- en afwezigheid van ervaren invloed op implementatiebereidheid. Op basis hiervan formuleren we twee complementaire interpretaties. Ten eerste dat ervaren invloed een quasi-noodzakelijke (rand)voorwaarde voor implementatiebereidheid is, maar op zichzelf staand niet voldoende om frontliniemedewerkers te motiveren. Ten tweede dat ervaren invloed alleen een motiverend effect heeft indien frontliniemedewerkers het te implementeren beleid als zinvol ervaren. Op basis van datasets van zowel leraren als medewerkers in het gezondheidsdomein (waaronder psychologen en psychiaters) tonen we aan dat ervaren invloed inderdaad een quasi-noodzakelijke (rand)voorwaarde is voor implementatiebereidheid. Voor de assumptie dat een gebrek aan invloed leidt tot lage implementatiebereidheid vinden we slechts deels bewijs. Tot slot laten we zien dat ervaren invloed in combinatie met zinvol beleid een quasi-voldoende voorwaarde is voor hoge implementatiebereidheid. Oftewel: ervaren invloed is een randvoorwaarde voor implementatiebereidheid, maar uiteindelijk is de zinvolheid van het beleid daarbij doorslaggevend. Deze bevindingen tonen aan dat het van toegevoegde waarde kan zijn de relatie tussen (algemene) beleidsvervreemding zowel vanuit asymmetrisch als symmetrisch perspectief te bestuderen.

Waarom is het relevant dit te onderzoeken?

Met dit onderzoek dragen we bij aan de kennis over beleidsimplementatie en de 'street-level bureaucratie'. Ondanks het feit dat de literatuur erkent dat frontlinie-medewerkers een belangrijke rol spelen bij beleidsimplementatie, marginaliseert management- en beleidsonderzoek hun percepties en ervaringen. Vaak staat bovendien de zogenaamde 'top-down' aanpak centraal. Dit is opvallend, omdat beleidsimplementatie complex, tegenstrijdig en een belangrijke – misschien wel de belangrijkste – uitdaging is voor politici en beleidsmedewerkers. In onze studie staat daarom het perspectief van schoolleiders en leraren centraal. Onze eerste bijdrage is dat we het nieuwe concept van algemene beleidsvervreemding introduceren en daarmee erkennen dat frontliniemedewerkers een historie van beleidswijzigingen en daarmee ideeën over de effectiviteit, legitimiteit en zinvol-heid van overheidsbeleid met zich meebrengen. We benadrukken hiermee dat frontliniemedewerkers geen neutrale uitvoerders van overheidsbeleid zijn. Dit is wellicht niet opzienbarend, maar wel iets wat in de praktijk van beleid maken nog een ondergeschoven kind lijkt. Door deze historie van beleidservaringen te bestuderen, breiden we het theoretische werk over beleidsaccumulatie en gerelateerde concepten als institutionele gelaagdheid uit. Onze tweede bijdrage is dat we niet alleen analyseren welke factoren bijdragen aan implementatie-mislukking, maar ook welke factoren bijdragen aan implementatiesucces. Dit in tegenstelling tot de meerderheid van implementatiestudies, die zich sinds de jaren '70 vooral lijkt te kenmerken door een complete focus op alles wat er mis gaat. Ons onderzoek daarentegen laat zien dat meer beleidsconsistentie bijdraagt aan positieve beleidspercepties, daarbij leunend op studies die een rationeel perspectief op beleid maken adopteren, waaronder politicologisch onderzoek naar de status quo bias van ambtenaren.

Methodologisch dragen we bij door relatief nieuwe onderzoekstechnieken te gebruiken. Ten eerste voeren we kwantitatief onderzoek uit naar de street-level bureaucratie. Traditioneel is dit een vrij kwalitatief georiënteerd onderzoeksveld, wat onder andere het trekken van generaliseerbare conclusies lastig maakt. Onze kwantitatieve aanpak maakt het mogelijk implementatietheorieën en -assump-ties op grotere schaal te testen. Dit doen we bijvoorbeeld door het uitvoeren van een surveyexperiment. Dit draagt bij aan de ontwikkeling van de 'gedragsbe-stuurskunde', die opereert op het snijvlak van bestuurskunde en psychologie. Het

is noodzakelijk dat ook onderzoek naar de street-level bureaucratie onderdeel is van deze ontwikkeling. Daarnaast ontwikkelen we twee schalen om ons concept te meten. Ondanks het feit dat het aantal meetinstrumenten ontwikkelt door bestuurskundigen stijgt, wordt er helaas nog te vaak 'ad-hoc' een meetinstrument ontwikkeld. Dit maakt het lastig bevindingen van verschillende studies met elkaar te vergelijken. Onze meetinstrumenten zijn daarnaast ook vrij beschikbaar voor politici, beleidsmakers en praktijkonderzoekers die de ervaringen van frontliniemedewerkers met algemeen en specifiek overheidsbeleid onderzoeken. Meer begrip van deze ervaringen lijkt op basis van dit onderzoek een randvoorwaarde voor beter begrip van implementatiesucces en –mislukking. Dit is met name relevant voor die publieke sectoren waarbij overheden voor het bereiken van maatschappelijke verandering afhankelijk zijn van frontliniemedewerkers, zoals op het gebied van zorg, onderwijs en veiligheid.

Conclusie

We hebben in dit onderzoek de relatie tussen algemene beleidsvervreemding en beleidsimplementatie onderzocht. Op basis van onze onderzoeksbevindingen, stellen we dat het relevant is als overheden meer aandacht besteden aan het feit dat frontliniemedewerkers alles behalve neutrale uitvoerders van overheidsbeleid zijn. Daarom stellen we dat het relevant is onderscheid te maken tussen specifieke en algemene ervaringen met beleid, omdat dit zorgt voor een beter begrip van implementatiesuccessen of –mislukkingen. Dit doen we door het verfijnen van het bestaande beleidsvervreemdingsraamwerk. Daarnaast onderstrepen onze resultaten het belang van beleidsconsistentie. We laten zien dat beleidsconsistentie gemiddeld genomen bijdraagt aan zinvoller beleid en meer legitimiteit van de overheid, maar dat dit wel afhankelijk is van autonomie en het type beleid wat de overheid continueert. Ons onderzoek suggereert daarmee dat oog hebben voor consistentie een zinvolle strategie kan zijn voor overheden om hun beleidsimplementatie te versterken doordat de uitvoerders meer toegewijd en betrokken zijn. Tot slot dragen we bij aan de voortdurende discussie over het belang van discretie voor frontliniemedewerkers bij het ontwerpen en uitvoeren van beleid. Onze bevindingen laten zien dat de meerderheid van de frontliniemedewerkers die discretie en invloed ervaart een hoge implementatiebereid heeft. We roepen academici en de praktijk daarom op om na te denken hoe deze

inherente discretie slimmer in te zetten bij de ontwikkeling en implementatie van beleid. Concluderend dragen we met dit onderzoek bij aan het debat over beleidsimplementatie en street-level bureaucratie en de vraag hoe om te gaan met de complexe, rommelige en soms tegenstrijdige implementatie van overheidsbeleid.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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