Study 2

Going the Extra Mile? How Street level Bureaucrats Deal with the Integration of Immigrants

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ABSTRACT

Dutch immigration and integration policies are being interpreted and implemented by local street-level bureaucrats. We carried out 28 semi-structured interviews with integration coaches, integration teachers and client managers in order to understand the dilemmas they face, and to explain their subsequent behavior. The results show that although organizational characteristics such as the bureaucratic burden made street-level bureaucrats reluctant to enlarge their discretionary space at the expense of policy rules, their willingness to help clients often transcends these boundaries under a combination of three conditions: high client motivation, extreme personal distress of the client, and negative assessment of existing policies and policy instruments (both in terms of fairness and practicality). Furthermore, street-level bureaucrats were found to be constantly reinterpreting and revising their roles.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study investigates how street-level bureaucrats implementing integration policies in the Netherlands deal with their discretionary power to make decisions that impact both the lives of immigrants and the original policy goals. In a recent study about the effects of bureaucratic contacts on the lives of migrants, we found that such contacts reinforce or dampen the extent of immigrants' integration into Dutch society. For example, contacts which lead to outcomes in favour of the immigrant will lead to a positive attitude on the part of the immigrant, which in turn will make the bureaucrat go the extra mile for this person. However, bureaucratic contacts with unfavourable results for the immigrant can bring about a vicious circle of disappointment (Belabas and Gerrits 2015, forthcoming). Bureaucrats are being confronted with uniform bureaucratic rules on the one hand, and the diversity of immigrants on the other. Street-level bureaucrats will therefore have to negate the tensions between migrants and the standardized bureaucracy. Integration processes can thus be reinforced or dampened through bureaucratic contacts, which may lead to resilience against such policy attempts or more willingness to participate in the host society (Belabas and Gerrits 2015, forthcoming).

It is important to know more about the motives behind bureaucrats' decisions. These decisions not only involve coping strategies that limit work efforts but also expand official job descriptions and client involvement. Following Lipsky (1980), we are interested in street-level bureaucrats who interact directly with immigrants on a daily basis and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their tasks. In particular, we are interested in street-level bureaucrats who work with immigrants *after* they have obtained a residence permit. This leads to the following research question: Under what conditions are street-level bureaucrats working with immigrants likely to transcend the boundaries of their discretionary space in order to deal with the dilemmas in their work?

Little attention has been paid to the relationship between formal policies and actual implementation of integration policies (Van der Leun 2006). With the exception of a few studies (see Bouchard and Carroll 2002; Armenta 2012; Hagelund 2009; Van der Leun 2003; Ellermann 2005; Lewis and Ramakrishnan 2007; Fuglerud 2004; Marrow 2009; Graham 2002), there is not much research regarding street-level bureaucracy and integration policy implementation. A limited number of studies focus on entry and exit officials, while research in the Netherlands mainly focuses on how bureaucrats implement national policies towards unauthorized migrants (e.g. Van der Leun 2003). Therefore, we aim to reconstruct the dilemmas that street-level bureaucrats are confronted with in their daily interaction with *authorized* immigrants, focusing on the issues they face and explaining the variation in their behaviour. In addition, because the street-level bureaucracy literature focuses on

how street-level workers deploy coping strategies to deal with the overwhelming nature of their work to effectively limit their efforts, we also aim to analyze the other side: When and why do street-level bureaucrats chose to go the extra mile for a client? We present the theoretical background in the second section, and the data collection and methods in the third section. Our empirical findings concerning the dilemmas, behaviour and motives of street-level bureaucrats are presented in the fourth section, and the conclusions and discussion in the fifth section.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Our work builds on Lipsky's research into the behaviour and motives of street-level bureaucrats who interact directly with citizens when implementing and delivering public policies (Lipsky 1980). Because street-level bureaucrats always have some kind of discretion, which they are often forced to use, their decisions and behaviour not only help them to implement public policy, but *are* public policy (Lipsky 1980). However, limited time and resources means that frontline workers are frequently making decisions, not only about which clients they will and can help but also about how they will help them. In doing so, they are searching for the right balance between compassion and flexibility on the one hand, and impartiality and rule-application on the other. Lipsky and others argue that such bureaucrats develop coping strategies – e.g. rationalizing, automating and reducing the demand of service/activity – as ways of achieving a fair and manageable workload.

Aside from the practical limitations that force street-level bureaucrats into such coping strategies, they also hold their own ideas and practices of being professional. Evans (2011), for example, criticizes the street-level perspective, because Lipsky's account of discretion within street-level bureaucracies paid 'insufficient attention to the role of professionalism and the impact on the relationship between frontline managers and workers and the nature of the discretion' (Lipsky 1980: 368). The notion of professionalism hence influences street-level bureaucrats' ideas of discretion, values and practice, and construction of service users as clients. In line with Evans (2011), Kallio and Kouvo (2014: 331) argue that the notion of 'street-level bureaucrats' has its limitations because those with a professional background seem to have different ideas about deservingness than those with a non-professional background. Therefore, it is important to examine how street-level workers view policies and procedures and whether they feel that they are bound by these rules (Evans 2012: 8).

There is a substantial body of knowledge about street-level bureaucratic behaviour that pays attention to identifying patterns of behaviour, including coping behaviour and – as

the work referred to in the above shows – *explaining* them. However, according to Winter (2002: 5) explaining the behaviour of street-level bureaucrats is much more difficult because Lipsky did not offer such explanation himself, but rather focused on similarities in behaviours. Nonetheless, attempts have been made to identify causal mechanisms that drive street-level bureaucratic behaviours. Some authors observe a tendency to find a uniform implementation theory that applies *across* different policies, while it seems more productive to conduct research as a means of 'developing partial theories and hypotheses about different and more limited implementation problems and on putting these to serious empirical tests' (Winter 2007: 136). For example, Loyens and Maesschalck (2010: 73) argue that '[…] because of the complex environment that street-level bureaucrats are embedded in […], neither one single factor nor one single theory can fully explain the exercise of street-level discretion'. Consequently, there is a 'need to develop more […] theories on how individual, organizational and situational factors channel street-level discretion into *specific* directions' (Loyens and Maesschalck 2010: 73). Although existing literature lists relevant factors, it does not seem to fully succeed in explaining how and under which circumstances these factors have impact on bureaucratic behaviour (Loyens and Maesschalck 2010: 73).

The challenge identified by Loyens and Maesschalck (2010) had also been noted earlier by Scott (1997) who – in accordance with Prottas (1979) and Hasenfield (1983) – categorized previous studies around three broad sets of determinants that influence street-level bureaucratic behaviour: (1) individual characteristics; (2) organizational characteristics; and (3) the importance of client attributes in influencing decision outcomes. Loyens and Maesschalck (2010) use these categories in their work and offer the following overview of empirical studies: (1) *the role of individual decision-maker characteristics* (see e.g. Miller 1967; Brehm and Gates 1997; Kroeger 1975; Meyers and Vorsanger 2003, Sandfort 2000; Winter 2001); (2) *the influence of organizational characteristics* (see e.g. Wasserman 1971; Peyrot 1982; Aiken and Hage 1966; Vinzant and Crothers 1998); and (3) *the importance of client attributes in influencing decision outcomes* (see e.g. Goodsell 1980, 1981; Hasenfield and Steinmetz 1981; Smith 2003). Loyens and Maesschalck also mention the work of Vinzant and Crothers (1998) in which a fourth category is distinguished, namely: (4) *extra organizational factors*, such as the broader community, laws and regulations, the media, other service agencies, and general situational variables.

Scott (1997) argues that the question of *how* the different factors relate to each other largely remains unanswered. In his research on newly-hired case workers in a local public assistance agency, he operationalized different factors among the three categories and found that the level of organizational control and client characteristics had a bigger influence on the awarding of benefits and services to clients than individual decision-maker

attributes. Since then more studies on the relative importance of factors among the three categories have been conducted, but because of the mixed and sometimes even conflicting empirical findings many questions are still left unanswered. Loyens and Maesschalck (2010) contend that research on the category of 'client attributes' in particular reveals an ambiguity in the findings on its importance, especially compared to the other categories.

The contribution of this study lies in providing a better understanding of the relative importance of different factors by *contextualizing under what conditions* street-level bureaucrats show specific behaviour towards immigrants, a policy field that has been under-represented in the literature on implementation practices of street-level bureaucrats. Instead of focusing on existing literature to define and operationalize factors within the broad categories, the data itself was used to understand and reconstruct the stories of street-level bureaucrats who frequently interact with immigrants during their integration trajectory. Our qualitative approach is therefore grounded in the street-level bureaucrat's own images in concrete contexts, meaning: their *self-perceived* understanding of why they act as they do. We argue that such an approach is necessary to portray a more encompassing picture of the self-perceived motives for street-level behaviour. Tummers, Bekkers, Vink and Musheno (2013: 29), for example, note that too many scholars in the field of street-level bureaucracy continue to draw on the existing literature, which according to grounded theory approaches, runs the risk of overlooking social phenomena by focusing only on those issues that were previously identified in the literature. This is problematic, not least because of various major developments that are influencing the work of street-level bureaucrats (Tummers *et al*. 2013: 29). For this reason, we approached the three categories – 'individual-decision maker characteristics', 'organizational characteristics' and 'client-attributes' – as sensitizing concepts, which gave us a 'general sense of reference and guidance' in approaching our empirical field (Bowen 2006: 14), while offering us enough flexibility to generate some systematic reflections upon the actual data. The next section presents the methods used in this study

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Against this theoretical background, 28 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with street-level bureaucrats working with immigrants: 'integration teachers' (12; Dutch: *docenten inburgering*), 'integration counsellors' (six; Dutch: *trajectbegeleiders*) and 'client managers' (four; Dutch: *klantmanagers*). In addition, we interviewed five respondents who worked both as a teacher and as counsellor.

The teachers are responsible for the language and integration courses. They interact with immigrants on a regular – and in some cases on a daily – basis, while at the same time implementing the actual *content* of integration programmes. The integration counsellors are responsible for the migrant's integration *process*. Their main task is to ensure that the migrant passes the civic integration exam. Immigrants need to pass certain exams in order to receive a permanent residence permit. The programme is characterized by integration tests, courses and contracts as a means of promoting individual autonomy and common values among immigrants. The client managers are responsible for *monitoring* that immigrants comply with the terms and conditions that the authorities have imposed upon them.

We conducted our interviews in two major cities (Rotterdam and The Hague) and two small cities (Gorinchem and Dordrecht). The teachers and integration counsellors were identified through three large educational institutions, in Rotterdam, Dordrecht and Gorinchem. The client managers were working for the municipalities in Dordrecht, Gorinchem and The Hague.1

We sent a general call for participation, which our contact persons dispersed among potential respondents. We minimalized sample-selection bias by assuring our contact persons full anonymization and then individually contacted respondents who were willing to be interviewed. The low number of client managers in the sample can be explained by the fact that, since January 2013, municipalities no longer have (formal) tasks regarding immigrants' civic integration. The number of client managers working at municipalities therefore decreased rapidly.

The interviews were semi-structured and comprised the following themes: (1) the dilemmas street-level workers encountered in their work; (2) the way they dealt with these dilemmas; and (3) the motives for dealing with the dilemmas.2

The length of the interviews varied between 30 and 60 minutes. Respondents were free to elaborate regarding the main topics and could also narrate related relevant experiences. The wide range of topics was to enable us to map the various reasoning and decision-making patterns of the participants. The interviews were hand-coded using a standardized topic book, which our 'sensitizing concepts' had provided the basis for. The resulting patterns are discussed in the following sections.

4. RESULTS

We describe the dilemmas, behaviour and motives of street-level bureaucrats in this section. Subsequently, we reflect on several factors – such as role interpretation, policy change and learning behaviour – that further complicate the decision-making of teachers, counsellors and client managers.

Dilemmas: stuck between obedience and compassion

Dealing with personal distress of immigrants

The dilemma mentioned most often by all respondents concerned the difficult personal circumstances of immigrants. A great number of participants in the integration courses are dealing with all kinds of financial, psychological and health problems that in some cases are the result of the immigration itself. Refugees, in particular, are often confronted with multiple problems, which sometimes affect their willingness or ability to comply with formal requirements. While seeing the difficulties that immigrants have to deal with on a daily basis, the respondents have to implement policies concerning the immigrants' status. Some examples are that immigrants have to attend at least 80 per cent of the integration course and absence may be fined; they have to pay for their own exams after failing them three times; and not passing the exam may have consequences for obtaining a residence permit. Most respondents argue that being aware of the daily struggles of immigrants makes it more difficult to actually carry out the integration policies. The following quote illustrates this in a profound way:

> *'When he told me why he had been absent for such a long time – he had gone to solve some serious family problems – I found it very difficult to inform social services about it, because I knew this would result in severe financial problems for him.'* (teacher, Dordrecht, 2013)

In such cases, respondents found themselves in a difficult position, because they know that their actions and decisions can affect the lives of immigrants negatively. The dilemma hence encompasses weighing the importance of strictly implementing policy rules on the one hand, and matching those rules with the needs and circumstances of the immigrant on the other hand. In the latter case it means finding some kind of other (official or unofficial) solution for the situation. Responding to these distressing personal circumstances and needs necessitates a constant weighing up of the pros and cons of alternative behavioural choices. Teachers, counsellors and client managers working at different locations *all* mentioned encountering this dilemma in their work.

Drawing the 'right' boundaries

Being one of the few contacts that some immigrants have with the 'outside-world' makes it especially hard for teachers and counsellors to decide exactly how far their help and assistance can and should go, because they are constantly being asked by their clients to solve the various kinds of problems that they are dealing with. These problems often affect their performance in the integration course, which makes the decision whether or not to intervene even more difficult. As a result, the street-level bureaucrat – regardless of to which professional group he or she belongs – is faced with the question of how far the coaching and helping of the migrant can and should go. The following statement illustrates this:

> *'When they bring letters with them – letters that they don't understand because of their language deficit – and they expect you to help them understand the information in it, it's very hard to say "no that doesn't fit in with my tasks as a teacher". You are their only connection to society and the only resource to understand the Dutch system, so they share with you that which they are struggling with in their daily lives'* (teacher, Dordrecht, 2013)

Reinterpreting tasks, roles and responsibilities beyond the formal position, assignment and tasks, appears inherent to the job but this makes it necessary to determine how far the client should be assisted, considering the bureaucrat's formal task description on the one hand and the extensibility of that description on the other hand. Moreover, the data show that this process of reinterpreting the limits of acceptable help – especially in the context of the difficult personal circumstances that clients often find themselves in – is distressing for the street-level bureaucrat.

Opposing versus supporting 'harsh policies'

The public debate about immigration and integration in the Netherlands has changed, leading to stricter demands on immigrants. Often, our respondents mentioned the 'hostile' societal and political atmosphere towards immigrants, which raises the question to what extent the new policies can be considered reasonable and just. We found the respondents reflecting constantly on this question when implementing policies, wondering if and how they can and should correct unintended and unwanted effects. Because of their close interaction with immigrants, these effects are often very real and clear, particularly to teachers and counsellors. When the legal possibilities to correct such effects are restricted, the question of whether or not and how to deal with the situation becomes even more important. The following quote illustrates this point:

> *'It is mandatory for clients to arrive on time in class, but I can imagine that it isn't that easy for a single-parent mother who has to bring her children to school in the morning. The*

question then arises of how to deal with the situation, because I am obligated to register their absence … I find that very difficult.' (teacher, Gorinchem, 2013)

Here, the expectations and requirements that immigrants have to meet during their integration programme do not seem to fit well with the reality of immigrants' lives. Street-level bureaucrats are insistently pressed to consider the question of whether existing integration policies are 'just' and 'fair'. Likewise, some of the teachers argued that the way Western society is portrayed during the course should be less idealistic, because immigrants are being forced to accept Western values as superior to their own. Again, the respondents would mention the public debate about immigration, national identity and the need for integration, as a way of emphasizing how this atmosphere impacts the specific content of the civic integration programmes. This in turn presents them with situations in which they are confronted with policies intended to stimulate immigrant integration that they often do not feel comfortable with. The dilemma thus lies in deciding whether to respond to the trends in policy that *urge* immigrants to accept 'Dutch norms and values' or to rely on a more flexible interpretation of what it means to be a Dutch citizen. Thus, the content of the integration courses sometimes puts street-level bureaucrats in a difficult position.

Patterns of behaviour: finding ways to deal with the dilemmas

We found that all our respondents – regardless of their profession and location – showed some consistent behaviours in dealing with the pressures resulting from the dilemmas. In this section, we examine the ways in which they cope with their tasks.

Tendencies to obey the rules

All respondents argued that they were operating within a limited discretionary latitude. However, some also mentioned the high potential for personal stress. The limited possibilities to deviate – leading to fewer opportunities to respond to the needs of immigrants – reinforces feelings of discomfort and failure among the respondents. Nevertheless, a substantial part of the respondents felt that there is no alternative to obeying the rules set by the authorities. Frequently, respondents would describe situations in which the authorities ordered them to act according to certain rules that they did not understand or agree with. Yet, when asked how they dealt with this, most of them would respond that they had no choice other than to implement the rules as ordered by the authorities. As one client manager argued:

'It's not so much a question of how we deal with such things … it is as it is, and we have to adapt to the choices that the municipality made about how to offer assistance to newcomers' (client manager, The Hague, 2013)

Caution was thus observed in increasing discretionary power at the expense of policy, because all respondents felt that it was impossible to diverge from the clearly defined instructions and laws. It should be noted that each street-level bureaucrat mentioned the amount of paperwork that is incorporated in their daily work. Authorities request strict registration and monitoring of clients. Filling in forms, preparing reports and arranging documentation are all part of their daily activities. Teachers, counsellors and client managers all argued that the bureaucratic burden – combined with the strong tendency of the municipality towards transparency – reinforced the pressure to implement policies strictly. In addition, these administrative obligations also affect the time that they could spend on interacting with the migrant on solutions, which lead to respondents feeling dissatisfied about the assistance that they could give. In other words: bureaucratic work counterbalanced discretionary power.

Beyond formal duties: injecting personal meaning

The requirement to register and inform authorities about the decisions taken seems to make street-level bureaucrats reluctant to go against formal compliance standards. At the same time most bureaucrats would extend their involvement and commitment to clients, sometimes as a means of compensating for the 'damage' done by strictly following the rules. Showing an interest in the migrants' personal stories, explaining to them their legal rights and obligations as Dutch citizens, keeping an eye out for possible job vacancies, and motivating them to pass the exams by enhancing their self-esteem, are all examples of this. Here we observe a tendency on the part of bureaucrats to follow the rules, while at the same time injecting personal meaning in their role when it comes to the contribution they can make in the process of incorporating immigrants into their new society. The following quote illustrates this behaviour:

> *'When I know that a client has his third re-sit, I really try to motivate them, sometimes I even invite them to join one of my lessons that formally speaking they can't participate in … just to give them a helping hand, because that is what they need.'* (counsellor, Rotterdam, 2013)

Some respondents would even use their personal resources in an attempt to resolve some of the clients' problems. Sometimes these problems were only indirectly related to the integration requirements. For example, one of the counsellors wrote an application letter for his client. One of the teachers would occasionally pay the travel costs for clients who had major financial problems. Here, we observe that such behaviour leads to a broader role-interpretation that, in turn, gets street-level bureaucrats actively involved in immigrants' lives. This applies especially to teachers and counsellors, less so to client managers who interact with immigrants less frequently.

Respondents would often go beyond their formal duties to make sure that a client would get help or treatment suitable for their individual needs. Rather than getting involved in personal matters, bureaucrats would commit to providing the client with the best possible solution, even if this meant that they had to invest far more time and effort than was expected of them. Some of the counsellors made urgent and repeated calls to client managers in order to convince them to make exceptions for clients, for example, asking them overlook their absence or arranging exemptions from the integration exam. While it is debatable whether this behaviour directly violates the main goals of integration policy, it does suggest a deep personal involvement, which expresses itself in pursuing others to 'fairly bend the rules'.

Drawing your own plan: breaking the rules

A small number of respondents deliberately made decisions that clearly contradicted policy goals. Some of them would intentionally ask clients about their personal circumstances, in order to use that information to bend the rules in the client's favour. For example, a client manager said that before imposing a fee on a client, she would explicitly explain to the migrant that the information he was about to give is critical for her decision. While listening to the client, she would look for reasons that could provide justification for delaying financial measures. Here we observe a tendency whereby street-level bureaucrats put the interests and well-being of their clients above policy rule, even if this means acting against the spirit of those rules. The following quote illustrates this:

> *'The national government decided that clients who started the integration course in 2010 had to take an exam in 2012. (…) This decision was the result of a political game that I don't want to be part of … so instead of pressuring my clients – that is what they want you to do – I told them that the exam is insignificant, and that it was just a bureaucratic procedure that they had to endure.'* (counsellor, Gorinchem, 2013)

Another observation is that of teachers who do not register clients who arrive too late in class, even though they are formally obliged to inform the client managers. In addition, one of the respondents organized an intensive one-on-one integration course for his client. Instead of the official two-days-a-week programme that the migrant had to participate in over a six-month period, the teacher decided to arrange a personal course that lasted only two months. Here, we observe that there is a small group of workers who intentionally break policy rules.

Self-protection: creating distance

Lastly, and contrary to the findings above, we observed that a minority of the respondents tried to create distance between themselves and clients. As noted earlier, being informed about an immigrant's personal situation makes it harder for bureaucrats to comply with existing policies. The statement below illustrates this:

> *'Frankly, I just don't want to know about all their problems … I really try to avoid such conversations as much as I can, because I know that I can't help them. Just keep it formal, it's the only way to do your job properly.'* (teacher, Gorinchem, 2013)

Avoiding conversations about personal circumstances is considered the only way bureaucrats can implement the rules and prevent themselves from getting emotionally involved. Some respondents would therefore stick to formal means to meet the needs of the client. In other words, their support would always be exclusively related to the formal criteria of the civic integration course. Instead of using their personal resources or trying to search for creative ways to bend the rules, they would, for example, redirect clients to social agencies that could provide suitable aid for them.

Although most respondents felt uncomfortable in sticking to rules, they would still conform to formal standards, for example, by consistently registering absent clients. This way of coping is more prominent in client managers and teachers than in counsellors. Building a close relationship with the immigrant and being fully informed of his or her personal situation is part of the counsellor's job and can hardly be avoided. It should be noted that this way of coping with the dilemma leads both to more rule application *and* to less exposure to other dilemmas. The formal relationship with immigrants prevents them from asking for help outside the classroom. While this is precisely what those respondents aim at with this attitude, it also seems to make them feel uncomfortable and dissatisfied with their work. Before drawing conclusions though, we first need a better understanding of the arguments that teachers, counsellors and client managers give for their own behaviour. The next section explains why these bureaucrats act the way they do.

Explaining bureaucratic behaviour: underlying motives

As shown above, the daily use of discretionary powers often reflects tension between competing demands, 'the need for standardized treatment of clients versus the need to consider the unique circumstances of each client' (see also Scott 1997: 19). The question then is: How do these street-level bureaucrats view, explain or justify their own behaviour? The previous sections showed that the organizational context in which street-level bureaucrats operate influences the level of discretion and subsequently the choices that they

made: the workload in terms of bureaucratic formalities and monitoring by authorities made them reluctant to *deliberately* deviate from existing policy rulings. Despite these organizational restrictions, the willingness to increase discretionary power or to reject policy rules could transcend those restrictions *under some conditions*. Four motives are most decisive in doing so, and combinations of those motives reinforce the effect. In the following sections, we further examine these motives and their relative importance for the choices made by street-level bureaucrats.

Perceived willingness to learn: motivated clients

First, all respondents mentioned that the motivation of immigrants to learn and follow the rules has a strong influence on both the attitude that they would adopt towards them and the decisions they would make. Respondents were more likely to be attentive towards clients who demonstrated a strong *willingness* to conform to the demands – even when they were not actually conforming. In such cases, they would go beyond formal duties, which in turn led to their becoming actively involved in their client's life; and, finally, they would make more effort to arrange for or to pursue others to search for alternative solutions. In other words: there is a strong reciprocal relationship between clients' motivation and bureaucrats' willingness. One important aspect of this 'motivated attitude' is whether bureaucrats really feel that clients are honest and sincere in their attempts to comply. As the following quote shows, the respondents also acknowledge that it is an intuitive consideration, based on class-room observations:

> *'Determining the extent of motivation of the client, often it is based on the feeling you get from them. The client that I just told you about … she hardly spoke Dutch, but I felt she was in need and it wasn't her lack of effort that stopped her from passing the exam'* (counsellor, Rotterdam, 2013)

The way most street-level bureaucrats assess clients' attitude and how they subsequently respond to client demands is thus primarily based on the personal connection that they feel or have with immigrants.

But immigrants' motivation alone is not enough. Although it does explain how personal favours are granted, being motivated to fulfil the civic integration requirements is often not enough reason to actually disobey policy rules and goals. Only when this motivation of the migrant was *combined* with *at least one of the three motives* described below, would bureaucrats actually go the extra mile by deliberately violating the rules and perhaps undermining policy.

Perceived distress and anxiety of clients: deservingness

When migrants are faced with extremely distressing situations, street-level bureaucrats are more willing to increase their discretion in order to relieve the pressures on their clients. This suggests that bureaucrats not only consider whether the client is *deserving* of help – which mostly seems to be determined by clients' motivation as discussed previously – but also the extent to which he *needs* the help. A teacher, for example, explained that she did not inform social services about a client who did not attend the course for three weeks because she went to visit her sick mother in Turkey. She found this client's situation so tragic that she did not want to be responsible for adding a financial burden to it. Informing social services about her absence would have meant severe financial consequences. In particular, street-level workers would use the client's severe personal circumstances to justify deviation from the existing policy rules in the case of clients who showed a strong willingness to comply. Similar motives were voiced by others, as the statement below shows:

> *'I had a client who ended up in a centre for women, who experienced domestic violence, and once when her husband got aggressive with her again, she asked for my help … I'm not a social worker, but it was such a tragic situation, I decided to assist her as much as I could.'* (counsellor, Rotterdam, 2013)

Moreover, most of them felt that knowing about their client's distress had forced them to behave in the way they did. Especially in cases where immigrants did not have a social network, they felt there was no other choice than to adopt that role themselves. The perception of distress and anxiety of clients in the personal sphere therefore influences the decisions and attitudes of street-level bureaucrats, whereas the self-reliance of immigrants also affects their assessment of the severity of the situation and the extent to which further assistance is needed.

Perceived fairness and effectiveness of policies

The third motive influencing the willingness to help clients beyond the formal task description is the assessment of actual integration policies and the subsequent rules and obligations. Respondents were more likely to use their discretionary power in favour of motivated clients when the goals that clients were expected to meet were considered ineffective, unrealistic or unfair. As one teacher explained:

> *'The rules regarding integration changed in January 2013 (…) migrants have to pay for their own integration course, which is ridiculous in my opinion (…). Sometimes I direct them to websites where copyrighted materials are shared, or teaching materials, so that*

they can practice at home, although that's not allowed of course.' (teacher, Gorinchem, 2013)

The same goes for rules regarding sanctions attached to non-compliance of clients or the content of the integration course if it is inconsistent with the bureaucrats' views regarding effective, just and reasonable policies. A good illustration of this is the client manager who did not feel comfortable with the fact that immigrants over the age of 65 are obliged to participate in integration courses. Forcing someone of this age to attend the classes did not correspond with her ideas of a just system. Therefore, she found a creative way of dodging the rule: because health problems could be accepted by the authorities as a legitimate reason for not participating in the course, she would explicitly ask each of her clients over the age of 65 about their medical background. These examples show the importance of the assessment of whether the integration policies – and the requirements and rules that follow from them – are 'fair' and 'reasonable'.

Perceived practicality of policies

We also observed that evaluations made by these workers are not solely based upon whether or not they agree with integration policies. Rather, in some cases, they are based upon how realistic the demands are. A good illustration comes from the many teachers who did not register some clients for evening classes when they entered too late. They said that the authorities are being unrealistic in the demands imposed on immigrants: if a client has a full-time job and responsibilities towards his or her family, it is almost impossible for that person to attend four evening classes a week. The same goes for counsellors who consider the period assigned to pass the exam as 'highly unrealistic' and who try to extend that period. It is not that bureaucrats disagreed with immigration policies in general, rather they showed concerns about specific instruments and rules that derive from them. It is important to note that respondents would not act upon these concerns about unrealistic demands when they felt that the client in question had not made sincere efforts to succeed. This shows once more that a judgment about fairness, effectiveness or achievability of policies *in combination* with the perception of the clients' motivation plays an undeniable role in their utilization of discretionary power.

So far, we have demonstrated that street-level bureaucrats tend to deviate from formal requirements when dealing with motivated clients who are in extreme personal distress or who are considered as being treated unfairly by 'the system'. When integration policies and the rules deriving from them reflected the individual values of the respondents, they were far more eager to implement them, *regardless* of the attitude of clients. In fact, some of them even would go beyond their formal task description to achieve underlying policy goals. For example, when it was felt that their clients' behaviour in the classroom was

inconsistent with the content of the integration course, they would not only correct them, but sometimes even spend a significant part of their time educating and motivating them to embrace 'the Dutch way of life'. As one client manager explains:

> *'Once I had a client whose husband didn't want her to go to her integration classes, because he wanted her to stay at home and take care of the children and cook for him. That really made me angry and I invited them to discuss this, and I did everything I could to convince him to change his mind, even though formally I can't force them to do anything.'* (client manager, The Hague, 2013)

In other cases, teachers firmly refused requests by female clients to sit separately in class from the male clients, in order to make a point about 'how things work in the Netherlands'. In one case, a counsellor even went as far as personally advising her client about birth control, because she felt that the husband in question forced his will upon his wife. When asked about their motives, all mentioned their own individual values concerning equal rights and the emancipation of women in society. Both motivated and unmotivated clients would qualify for these kinds of advice and encouragement. Hence when policies were in line with their personal views, street-level bureaucrats took this as a justification of broadening their task description, thereby increasing discretionary power. Here we conclude that value systems of street-level bureaucrats seem to matter considerably.

Complex patterns: role interpretation, learning behaviour and the changing political reality

In the previous section we examined the main dilemmas and motives driving bureaucratic choices. We specified the conditions under which certain behaviours occur. However, when reconstructing behaviour and motives, we also noticed that street-level bureaucrats constantly revise their role, tasks and responsibilities. Initially, we argued that the more teachers, counsellors and client managers constricted their job interpretation, the less likely they were to search for official (or unofficial) solutions to the problems their clients were encountering. However, role definitions turned out to be changeable: respondents would often use previous experiences to redefine their role, which in turn affected the choices that they made later on when confronted with new situations. For example, some of the teachers and counsellors had clients who found themselves in life-threatening situations, sometimes as a result of domestic violence. Most of them decided to intervene by advising the clients to leave their partner or by actually providing them with the means to leave. In some cases, this made the situation even worse, leading to an escalation between clients and their partners. Learning from this, the respondents would decide to no longer become overly involved in the personal life of immigrants. It could also go the other way:

'Once I had a client with many problems, eventually he committed suicide. (…) You can imagine how that can affect you. Since that incident, when someone asks for my help, I really ask myself: have I done everything that I can?' (counsellor, Gorinchem, 2013)

Such examples reinforce our earlier conclusion about the process of role adaptation. In addition, we noticed that the dynamic political context also impacted behaviour towards clients. The lenient immigration and integration policies of the past are being replaced by stricter ones. Monitoring and accountability rules have become more important. All respondents argued that this reduced their discretionary space. The changing policies mean that discretionary power is being both restricted and enhanced relatively often. Consequently, respondents are reluctant to make promises to their clients.

These findings suggest that bureaucratic behaviour is not static or immutable, but is – as a result of learning behaviour and a dynamic political context – subject to constant change. Furthermore, while sometimes a change in role interpretation is the result of self-reflection and learning of the implementer himself, in other cases the shift in policies – an external factor – was the main cause of reinterpreting and reflecting one's position and tasks.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

We started with the observation that the implementation of integration policies in the Netherlands relies on street-level bureaucrats. We aimed to find out under what specific conditions street-level bureaucrats were willing to stretch the boundaries of their discretionary space in relationship to the dilemmas they face in their day-to-day work with immigrants. This study shows that, although organizational characteristics such as the workload in relationship to bureaucratic formalities and monitoring by the municipality made street-level bureaucrats reluctant to deliberately deviate from existing policies, their willingness to help clients could transcend these boundaries when the following conditions are *combined*: high client motivation, extreme personal distress of the client, and negative assessment of existing policies and policy instruments.

Most of the motives that drive street-level practices can also be found in other studies, albeit in a less-contextualized way. The present study shows both the client's *motivation* and perceived *need* – 'the worthiness of clients' – to stretch boundaries. This concurs with Maynard-Moody and Leland (2000), who argue that client motivation forms the primary dimension of moral worth (Brudney *et al*. 2000). The same goes for our findings concerning judgment of integration policies – and the rules and instruments that derive from them – which are based in the value systems of street-level bureaucrats. Our findings support the

conclusions by Bouchard and Carroll (2002: 254) that immigration policy is partly shaped by 'internal forces, in particular by the attitudes and values of those implementing it'. Individual values of street-level bureaucrats matter more than close supervision by superiors and existing rules, especially when the client in question is motivated and in need of assistance. Furthermore, our study shows that personal views of policies and procedures were not limited to particular professional groups. The dilemmas and considerations were not exclusively limited to teachers, counsellors or client managers, although it seemed harder for teachers and counsellors to maintain social distance between themselves and their clients. This finding confirms Evans' (2012: 15) position that 'it is valuable to consider the participants' *own* accounts of why a particular approach to organizational rules is important to them'. This study shows how different conditions can play an influential role in the attitude that street-level workers adopt towards those rules. It also shows how a participant's reasons for acting in a particular way are not static or immutable but rather subject to constant change.

We want to stress the importance of the combination of factors – a particular configuration – that drives bureaucrats to transcend their discretionary space in helping immigrants. When speaking about 'transcending discretionary power', our work proves that in dealing with the dilemmas that they encounter, street-level bureaucrats are prepared to 'go the extra mile' for clients, and that they 'are not necessarily simply concerned with making their work tolerable in ways that have negative impacts on users of their services' (Evans and Harris 2007). According to, for example, Musil *et al*. (2010) and Joffe (1981) and Perlman (1981) – as paraphrased in Evans and Harris (2007: 456) – Lipsky and other students of street-level bureaucracy have hardly focused on the efforts of such workers to develop better services despite difficult circumstances. However, whereas such authors point to the culture of social work services as an explanation for avoidance behaviour by street-level bureaucrats, we propose that the various conditions specified in this study are more important, at least for the situations in which the integration teachers, counsellors and client managers find themselves. We believe that such contextualized research is needed to better understand street-level workers' behaviour and the *various* ways in which they tackle the dilemmas that they experience in their work (Evans and Harris 2007; Harris and Kirk 2000; Evans 2006).

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