Explaining willingness of public professionals to implement public policies: Content, context and personality characteristics

Bram Steijn
Lars Tummers
Victor Bekkers

Dept. of Public Administration
Erasmus University Rotterdam
P.O. Box 1738
NL-3000 DR Rotterdam
Steijn@fsw.eur.nl
Tummers@fsw.eur.nl
Bekkers@fsw.eur.nl

Abstract

Currently, there is an intense debate on pressures facing public professionals. This debate often focuses on the (un)willingness of professionals - such as teachers and physicians - to implement new policies. In explaining this willingness, scholars often looked at the policy content, using qualitative case-studies. This has not led to a satisfactory explanatory framework. The aim of this research is twofold: (1) building a more all-encompassing, three-factor model (policy content, organizational context and personality characteristics of implementers) for explaining the willingness to implement policies; (2) quantitatively testing this model in a survey of 1.317 Dutch health professionals implementing a new reimbursement policy. The results show that policy content is the most important factor explaining this willingness. However, the organizational context and the personality characteristics of implementers are also influential, and have to be taken into account to properly study the attitudes of professionals towards public policies. The results of this research help in understanding why professionals embrace or resist implementing particular policies.

1   Introduction: Moving beyond the content of the policy?

At the moment, there is an intense debate going on concerning the pressures public professionals face in service delivery (Ackroyd et al., 2007; De Ruyter et al., 2008; Noordegraaf & Steijn, forthcoming 2011). The debate concerning these pressures is often focused on professionals executing public policies, such as teachers, welfare workers and physicians (Freidson, 2001; Knijn & Verhagen, 2007). These professionals seem to have problems with the policies they implement. For example, with the implementation of a new work disability decree in Dutch social security, about 240 insurance physicians urged a strike against this new policy, and some decided to simply quit their job (De Boer & Steenbeek, 2005). Another example is the introduction of a new reimbursement policy in Dutch mental healthcare (called Diagnose Behandeling Combinaties, or DBCs). In one large-scale survey, as many as 9 out of 10 professionals (mainly psychologists) wanted to abandon this policy and some openly demonstrated against it (Palm et al., 2008:11). Further, examples from Canada show that public professionals often do not accept new policies. As a result, they sometimes quit and start their own organizations (White, 1996). Hence, professionals often seem to be unwilling to implement new policies.

When public professionals are unwilling to implement public policies, this can have serious consequences. For instance, it can decrease the effectiveness of policy implementation. Sabatier (1986), for example, states as one of the necessary conditions for effective implementation 'committed and skilful implementers who apply themselves to using their discretion so as to realize policy objectives'. More recent policy implementation research continues to stress the importance of the willingness of the implementers (Ewalt & Jennings, 2004; May & Winter, 2009). As Ewalt & Jennings (2004:453) put it, 'It is clear from the literature there is much that members of an organization can do to stymie policy implementation.'

In trying to explain why public professionals resist implementing public policies, public administration research has often looked at the content of the policy, such as its goal or its characteristics (Winter, 2003). One important content-factor explaining unwillingness to implement policies looks at conflicting values. Scholars state that the values of contemporary policies – such as its focus on liberalization or efficiency – can conflict with professional values or the values of clients (Ackroyd et al., 2007; Freidson, 2001). Here, Emery and Giauque (2003:475) note that 'to focus on only the economic logic of action poses problems for public agents. They have to set aside some other shared values in order to concentrate solely on 'measurement management''. In so, role conflicts arise. In public administration research, these conflicts have been studied by several authors (Rizzo et al., 1970; Tummers et al., 2009).

Another important factor related to content is discretion. That is, the implementer has some freedom in terms of the type, quantity and quality of sanctions and rewards delivered, such as when a police officer decides whether to impose an on-the-spot fine (Lipsky, 1980). The discussion on discretion started from the concern of public administration lawyers about the possibility to control the implementation process, effectively opting for limiting discretion (for an overview, see Hill & Hupe, 2009:20-27). On the other hand, several scholars noted that a certain degree of discretion enables street-level officials to cope with the pressures they face (Lipsky, 1980; Riccucci, 2005). Further, for professionals implementing policies, it is noted that a low degree of discretion (or broader, low professional autonomy) can reduce their willingness to implement a policy (Freidson, 2001; Tummers, 2010). Hence, within the

field of public administration, an extensive literature has developed which examines discretion by street-level workers (Sandfort, 2000:730).

Whereas public administration has historically looked primarily at the content and discretion issues for explaining this willingness to implement public policies, it seems that this does not provide the full picture. To grasp this better, we have to look at the latest research in related disciplines. Here, scholars - from fields such as change management and applied psychology - note that is important to take several other factors into account, to properly explain willingness to implement policies. Here, they stress factors such as the organizational context and the personality characteristics of the implementers (Holt et al., 2006). Elaborating on this, Herold et al. (2007:950) state that

> We need to develop a greater understanding of the complexities of reactions to a particular change [such as a new policy]. Such reactions are a function not only of what is done and how it is done but also of the context in which it is done and the interaction of individuals' characteristics with that context. Embracing and further researching such complex change frameworks should prove to be a timely and productive endeavor for both researchers and practitioners.

To date, policy content & discretion, organizational context and the personality characteristics factors have not yet been included into a coherent framework for explaining the (un)willingness of public professionals to implement policies. Including additional factors can provide us with a broader, more all-encompassing, view at the experiences and attitudes of professionals towards governmental policies. This, in turn, can increase our understanding of professionals and their experienced pressures in public domains. In this paper, our goal is therefore to construct and test a more all-encompassing framework for analyzing the (un)willingness of public professionals to implement (governmental) policies.

We consider three possible groups of factors which can influence the (un)willingness of public professionals to implement public policies. The first factor examines the policy content and related discretion (the 'what') and is rooted in public administration literature. The second factor looks at the organizational context of implementation ('where'). This factor draws primarily from change management literature. Third, we examine the personality characteristics of the professionals ('who'), based on insights from applied psychology. By including these three factors we opt for a truly interdisciplinary approach, combining insights from different literature streams. In so, we follow Piderit (2000:784). She states that 'in other types of literature - not yet well integrated into research on resistance to change - scholars remind us of a wider range of reasons why employees may oppose a proposed organizational change'.

In so, we formulate the following research question:

What is the influence of 1. the policy content & discretion, 2. the organizational context and 3. the personality characteristics of the implementers on the willingness of public professionals to implement new public policies?

This brings us to the paper outline. First, we will discuss the theoretical framework, considering the relationships between the three explanatory factors and willingness to implement the policy. Second, we use a large scale survey to test the proposed explanatory framework. In July 2010, we conducted a survey among 1.317 Dutch psychologists, psychiatrists and psychotherapists implementing a new financial reward policy. The empirical

results – including hypothesis testing - are discussed. Third, we will discuss the limitations of this study, as well as its contribution to the debate of the pressures public professionals face.

2   Theoretical framework

In this section, we will build our theoretical framework. We firstly look at the dependent variable: the willingness of public professionals to implement public policies. This is done by reviewing insights from the change management literature, focusing on the concept of change willingness. Second, we look at the factors possibly influencing the willingness to implement public policies. This is structured using the three possible explanatory variables (content, context and personality characteristics of implementers).

2.1   Change management literature and change willingness

Early change management theories were based on the assumption that organizational change can be successfully planned by change managers. These are referred to as 'planned change' theories, and are often based on the seminal work of Lewin (1951). Lewin conceptualized change as progressing through successive phases labelled unfreezing, moving and refreezing. Building on this early work, others have described multi-phase models that change agents can follow in implementing changes (Galpin, 1996; Judson, 1991).

The planned change approach dominated the theory and practice of change management until the early 1980s. Since then, an 'emergent' change approach has become more prominent (Burnes, 2004; Kickert, in press). The emergent change approach does not consider change as a linear process, or an isolated event, but sees change as a continuous, recursive and unpredictable process. An emergent change process consists of a continuous sequence of autonomous, local initiatives. Change appears to be unplanned and unexpected (Weick, 2000). Weick argues that the 'planned change' view underestimates the value of innovative sense-making and the extent to which change is continuous and cumulative. That is, there is no deliberate orchestration of change, no dramatic discontinuity and no definitive steps in the change.

Although the planned and the emergent change approaches differ considerably, they both stress that willingness to implement a change by members of an organization is crucial. Metselaar (1997:42) defines this change willingness as 'a positive behavioural intention towards the implementation of modifications in an organization's structure, or work and administrative processes, resulting in efforts from the organization member's side to support or enhance the change process.' He constructed a reliable and valid scale for examining change willingness. According to planned change theories, an absence of willingness would result in a situation where top management's intentions to instil a change are not being transformed into real change efforts by lower echelons (Judson, 1991). According to academics belonging to the emergent school, unwillingness would impede the process of endless modifications, which would no longer accumulate and amplify. Indeed, throughout change management history it is has been fairly unambiguously claimed that a crucial condition for success is that employees are willing to implement the change (Carnall, 2007; Lewin, 1951).

In this paper, we will use the concept of change willingness to examine the willingness of public professionals to implement a particular public policy. In so doing, we draw on insights from change management literature - which has a long history of examining willingness to change – to examine policy implementation by public professionals.

2.2   Choosing variables for building the theoretical framework

Having examined the background of willingness to change (here: to implement a new public policy), we can look at the factors possibly influencing this willingness. To gain insight in these factors, we have reviewed the literature in search of the variables most likely to be related to willingness to implement new policies. In so, we identified a number of variables belonging a) to the content factor, b) to the context factor and c) to the personality characteristics factor. These variables were chosen on the basis of three criteria: (a) there appeared to be a theoretical relationship between the variable and willingness to implement new policies (b) well-validated measures of the variables existed; and (c) construct validity evidence existed for these variables, and they had been used successfully in previous research (see also Judge et al., 1999).

By using this approach, this study is methodologically innovative. To date, most policy implementation studies have had a rather qualitative nature (O'Toole, 2000). The limited quantitative research which has been taken place, often fails to use validated scales, even those published in the top journals of the field (for example Cho et al., 2005; May & Winter, 2009). We use psychometrically scales and test the selected variables in a large-n study. This helps us to can achieve new, sound, insights concerning the experiences at the 'street-level', where public employees implement public policies.

2.3   Factor 1: Policy content & discretion

First, the content of the policy is considered. As noted, in trying to explain why public professionals resist implementing public policies, public administration research has often looked at the content of the policy, such as its goal or its characteristics (Winter, 2003). Based on the three criteria shown in the previous paragraph, we here focus on meaningfulness of a policy and discretion during its implementation.

For the meaningfulness factor, it seems that a strong theoretical relationship exists with the willingness of public professionals to implement public policies (Matland, 1995; Tummers et al., 2009). Ultimately, the goal of public policies is to make meaningful contributions to society, such as reducing crime rates or creating financial stability. For implementers, it is important to understand the contribution a policy makes towards these goals (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2003). Meaninglessness occurs when these implementers are unable to comprehend the contribution of the policy to a larger purpose.

Two types of meaninglessness can be considered (Tummers et al., 2009). Firstly, professionals can feel that implementing a policy is meaningless, if, it does not deliver any apparent beneficial outcomes for society as a whole (Van Thiel & Leeuw, 2002). This is termed societal meaninglessness, and is expected to decrease their willingness to implement a policy. When professionals perceive high societal meaninglessness, they are sensing that a policy program is not actually dealing with the provision of desirable public services, such as financial protection and security. As a result, they might wonder why they have to implement such a policy. That is, the benefits for society are unclear to them. This may lead them to resist the new policy, and exhibit a low degree of change willingness (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999) .

Second, client meaninglessness is also expected to negatively influence willingness to change of public professionals. May and Winter (2009) found that when frontline workers perceive the instruments they have at their disposal for implementing a policy as ineffective for their clients, this is likely to add to their frustrations. They do not see how their implementation of the proposed policy helps their clients, and so wonder why they should

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implement it. Given that the evaluation of effectiveness is likely to be based on on-the-job experience, rooted in the circumstances that professionals encounter in doing their job, this aspect of attitude is likely to be particularly important when it comes to determining attitudes and behaviours (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2003).

Further, we also examine one important factor related to the policy content; discretion (Hill & Hupe, 2009). More discretion is expected to be positively related to change willingness. In the policy implementation literature, it is suggested that an important positive factor affecting the attitudes of street-level public servants is the extent to which organizations delegate decision-making authority to the frontline (Meier & O'Toole, 2002). This influence may be particularly pronounced in professionals, whose expectations of discretion and autonomy contradict notions of bureaucratic control (DeHart-Davis & Pandey, 2005).

In sum, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Societal meaninglessness will be negatively related to change willingness.
H2: Client meaninglessness will be negatively related to change willingness.
H3: Discretion will be positively related to change willingness.

2.4   Factor 2: Organizational context

Next to the policy content, the organizational context is examined. It seems important to take this factor into account, as in organization theory it has long been argued that behavior and attitudes have to be understood in terms of the organizational environment or background of the organization (Dess & Beard, 1984; Lawrence & Lorsch, 2006 [1967]). However, examining the organizational context while studying the introduction of new policies, or changes in general, is relatively new and underdeveloped (Herold et al., 2007:943-944). Here, we try to fill this lacuna by including three possibly important aspects of the organizational context into account: the turbulence in an organization, influence of professionals during organizational implementation and the subjective norm towards the policy.

Organizational turbulence describes the extent to which other change events or environmental distractions provided a backdrop for the policy being implemented (Herold et al., 2007). High change turbulence occurs when employees face an organizational change, but at the same time are confronted with numerous other major changes occurring in their organization. Looking at the implementation of a new policy, high turbulence means that there are many other changes going on in the organization at the same time as the implementation of the new policy. These other changes represent additional distractions and adaptation demands for the professionals, who possess finite resources (such as time and effort). In such a situation a policy - which is for example seen as highly meaningful by professionals - may still suffer from a lack of support of these professionals, as they are already overloaded by other changes. Hence, we expect that when professionals experience high change turbulence, they will be less willing to implement a new policy.

Secondly, we examine employee influence over decisions how a change is executed within their own organization. Change management literature notes that an increase in employee influence on change decisions leads to increased commitment and performance, and reduces resistance to change (Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Judson (1991) went as far as to state that involving employees is perhaps the most powerful lever that management can

use to gain acceptance of change. In the realm of policy implementation, we therefore expect that the more professionals experience that they can influence the way the policy is implemented within their organization, the more they will be willing to implement the new policy.

Lastly, we take into account the subjective norm. In his seminal theory of planned behavior, Azjen describes subjective norm as 'the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform behavior' (1991:188). Ajzen notes that, as a general rule, the more positive the subjective norm in an organization with respect to a behavior, the stronger should be an individual's intention to perform the behavior. This subjective norm is based on the attitudes of significant others towards the behavior. Hence, social theories suggest that any individual's behavioral intention may be shaped by the attitude of significant others towards that behavior. In the case of professionals implementing a new policy, important significant others in the organization are their colleagues in their department, their subordinates, their managers and their board of directors. These constitute the (organizational) subjective norm for the professionals. We expect that a subjective norm in favor of the new policy will positively contribute to professionals' willingness to implement this policy. For instance, if a professional feels that his or her colleagues disapprove a new policy, parts of the subjective norm can be characterized as negative, making him or her more resistant towards implementing the new policy (see also Metselaar, 1997).

To sum up, it is hypothesized that:

H4: A higher degree of turbulence will be negatively related to change willingness.
H5: A higher degree of influence during organizational implementation will be positively related to change willingness.
H6: A subjective norm in favor of the policy will be positively related to change willingness.

2.5   Factor 3: Personality characteristics of the implementers

Lastly, we consider the personality characteristics of the professionals implementing the policy. Similar to the context of the organization, the personality characteristics of individuals have often been neglected in literature examining the attitudes towards changes. Here, Judge et al. (1999:107; see also Wanberg & Banas, 2000) note that 'very little research has taken a psychological focus in investigating the process of organizational change. Neglected is the possibility that successful coping with change lies within the psychological predispositions of individuals experiencing the change.' Here, we examine two personality traits.

Firstly, we take the notion of rebelliousness into account. Research involving rebelliousness – or psychological reactance – examines how individuals respond when their behavioural freedoms are restricted (Brehm, 1966). Rebelliousness can be considered a personality trait, in that some individuals interpret actions more as a threat to their freedom than others (Shen & Dillard, 2005). Scholars studying rebelliousness have shown that rebellious individuals -compared with non-rebellious individuals- are defensive, aggressive, dominant, autonomous, and non-affiliative (Dowd & Wallbrown, 1993). Further, rebelliousness was found to be negatively related to the readiness to change (Holt et al., 2006). Based on previous research on rebelliousness, we expect that rebellious individuals are likely to be more resistant to implement new policies. They might view a new policy as a threat towards their personal freedom and autonomy, and therefore be less willing to put effort into its implementation.

Secondly, we take the notion of rule compliance into account. Rule compliance is broadly defined as the belief of an individual that people have to obey governmental rules (Clague, 2003). In public administration literature, a number of scholars stress the importance of the rule compliance concept (Lan & Rainey, 1992; Lipsky, 1980). Rule compliance is related to, but logically independent of, rebelliousness. Rebelliousness examines the individual proneness to see something as a threat to his or her own freedom. Rule compliance, on the other hand, examines the beliefs of that individual that persons (*he/she and others*) should adhere to (governmental) rules. Public professionals scoring high on rule compliance feel that public rules and regulations should be adhered to. Based on this, we expect that these public professionals who are highly rule-compliant also to be more willing to implement a new governmental policy, unrelated to its content.

Overall, it is hypothesized that:

H7: A higher degree of rebelliousness will be negatively related to change willingness.
H8: A higher degree of rule-compliance will be positively related to change willingness.

2.6   Theoretical framework

Figure 1 shows the overall theoretical model representing the hypotheses developed above. In the following sections, we present the methodology for testing this model and our empirical results.
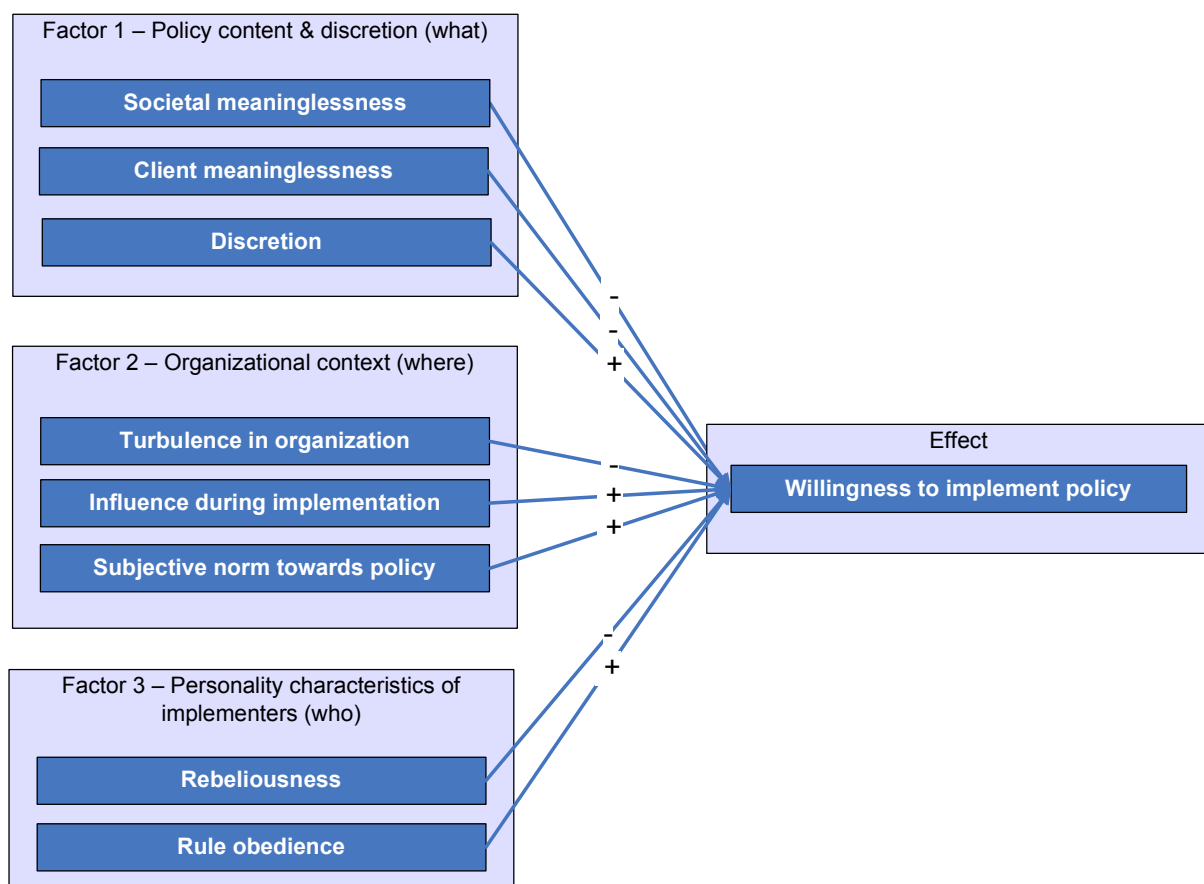

Figure 1 Theoretical framework for explaining willingness to implement new policies: policy content & discretion (what), organizational context (where) and personality characteristics (who)

3 Method

3.1 Testing the proposed model using the DTC policy

To test the proposed model, we undertook a survey of Dutch mental healthcare professionals implementing a new reimbursement policy. First, we provide a short overview of this policy.

In January 2008, the Health Insurance Law was introduced in the Netherlands. This was part of a process to convert the Dutch healthcare system into one based on a regulated market (Helderman et al., 2005). In the Health Insurance Law, a system of Diagnosis Treatment Combinations (DTCs) was developed as a means of determining the level of financial exchange for mental healthcare provision. The DTC policy differs significantly from the former method, in which each medical action resulted in a financial claim, i.e. the more sessions that a mental healthcare specialist had with a patient, the more recompense that could be claimed. According to some, this could lead to inefficiencies (Helderman et al., 2005; Kimberly et al., 2009). The DTC policy changed the situation by stipulating a standard rate for each disorder. The new Health Insurance Law and the associated DTCs can be seen as the introduction of regulated competition into Dutch healthcare, a move in line with NPM ideas. More specifically, it can be seen as a shift to greater competition and more efficient resource use (Hood, 1991:5).

We chose the DTC policy as the basis for testing our model for three reasons. Firstly, public professionals, here psychotherapists, psychologists and psychiatrists, will be the ones implementing the policy. Secondly, the DTC policy focuses strongly on economic goals, such as efficiency and client choice (Helderman et al., 2005), and earlier research indicates that policies which pursue these kinds of goals can create problems for professionals. As such, this policy fits therefore the research problem in hand. Thirdly, in numerous countries, there have been moves towards similar healthcare payment systems. In the early 1980s, Diagnostic Related Groups (DRGs) were developed in the USA to calculate cost prices for health 'products'. Since then, variants of the DRG system have been developed in Australia, Germany, England, Japan, Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands (Kimberly et al., 2009). This increases the possibility of generalizing the results of the analysis. Thus, overall, the DTC policy seems particularly appropriate for quantitatively examining factors that may influence the willingness of public professionals to implement new policies.

3.2 Sampling and response

We used a sampling frame of 5.199 mental health professionals, members of two nationwide mental healthcare associations (Nederlands Instituut van Psychologen and Nederlandse Vereniging voor Psychiatrie). These are all the members of these associations who could work with the DTC-policy. In the personalized email, we explained the purpose of the study, invited participation, and indicated that responses were confidential and would be analysed and presented anonymously. Using the email and two reminders, we received 1.317 full or partial returns of our questionnaire. Of those who did not complete the survey, 106 provided reasons. Some (34) did not work with DTCs for various reasons, for instance because DTCs were not yet implemented in their organization, or because their particular profession, such as primary healthcare, did not use DTCs. A number of them (25) responded that they had retired or changed occupation. These two groups were excluded from the sample. The overall response rate was thus 26%.

Gender composition of this group roughly equals the real distribution among Dutch mental healthcare professionals (Palm et al., 2008). Respondents' age was slightly higher than that of mental healthcare professional population (48 against 44). The educational levels were very high—24% had a minimally a bachelor's degree and 76% had undertaken graduate-level training or education (PhD or a specialisation). This is a clear indicator that we have indeed sampled health professionals who, in general, have a high educational level (Freidson, 2001).

3.3   Measures

Here, we report the measurement of our variables. All measures had adequate Cronbach alphas (ranging from .78 to .95), which are shown in the result section.

<u>Factor 1 – Policy content</u>

Societal meaninglessness
Tummers (2009) conceptualized societal meaninglessness as one of the dimensions of 'policy alienation'. Policy alienation is defined as a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the policy program being implemented by a public professional who, on a regular basis, interacts directly with clients. Policy alienation is conceptually associated with five dimensions: strategic powerlessness, tactical powerlessness, operational powerlessness (or discretion), societal meaninglessness and client meaninglessness. For these dimensions of policy alienation validated scales have been developed, which have shown good reliability (for a more elaborate discussion, see Tummers, 2009).

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

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

Discretion
Discretion concerns the (perceived) freedom of the implementer in terms of the type, quantity and quality of sanctions and rewards delivered (Lipsky, 1980). Discretion – or operational powerlessness - was measured using a six-item scale. Sample items were 'I have freedom to decide how to use DTCs (R)' and 'When I work with DTCs, I have to adhere to tight procedures'.

Factor 2 – Organizational context

Subjective norm
Subjective norm was measured using a validated five-item scale, developed by Metselaar (1997). As with the policy content scales, this scale uses templates in which one can specify the change being assessed. It examines the attitudes of five groups/individuals towards the policy: the board of directors, manager, colleagues, subordinates and others in the organizational unit. As such, sample items are: 'Please indicate how your colleagues feel about the DTC-policy' and 'Please indicate how your manager feels about the DTC-policy' (5-point scale, from very negative to very positive).

Turbulence in organization
To measure turbulence in an organization, we used the scale of Herold et al. (2007). This scale uses four items in order to capture the extent to which other change events or environmental distractions provided a backdrop for the change being studied. Some items for this scale were 'The introduction of DTCs occurred during a turbulent time for our work unit' and 'The introduction of DTCs would have been easier if we were not already dealing with a number of other changes'.

Influence during implementation
Influence of professionals during the implementation of the policy by the organization was measured using the concept of tactical powerlessness (which is the reverse of influence in the organization during implementation) (Tummers, 2009). These items tap into a professional's perceived influence on decisions concerning the way the DTC policy was implemented in their institution. Sample items were 'In my institution, especially mental healthcare professionals could decide how the DTC policy was implemented' and 'Mental healthcare professionals were not listened to over the introduction of the DTC policy in my institution'.

Factor 3 – Personality characteristics

Rebelliousness
We measured rebelliousness using a validated 11-item scale (Shen & Dillard, 2005). Here, Shen and Dillard note that using this 11-item scale is 'theoretically and empirically justifiable' (2005:80). Sample items are 'I become angry when my freedom of choice is restricted' and 'I resist the attempts of others to influence me'.

Rule compliance
Rule compliance is the individuals' beliefs about whether they are obliged to obey governmental rules. To measure rule compliance, we used the scale – consisting of five items - from the European Social Survey (Jowell, 2007). Here, sample items are 'A good citizen always complies with the rules and laws' ' and 'You always have to strictly abide the law, even it that means that will lose good opportunities as a result'.

Effect & control variables

Change willingness

Lastly, we measured change willingness using a validated five-item scale which has shown good reliability (Metselaar, 1997). This scale uses templates in which one can specify the change being assessed. Here, the change is the DTC-policy. As such, sample items are: 'I am willing to contribute to the introduction of DTCs' and 'I am willing to free up time to implement the DTC policy'. We see that here, we focus on 'intention to act'. In so, the proposed effect is conceptually different from the factors, which focus on attitudes and personality characteristics (Ajzen, 1991).

Control variables
Alongside the variables described above, we included commonly used control variables in our multivariate analysis. We included gender, age and management position (yes/no). Further, we used a variable showing whether a professional works (partly) independently or works only in an institution. This is taken into account, as professionals may come into contact differently with DTCs when they work independently.

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables are presented below:

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for the variables in the study

Variable	M	SD	Cronbach alpha
Control variables			NA
1. Sex (male = ref. cat.)	0.64	0.48	
2. Age	47.94	11.01	
3. Working (partly) independently (only in institution = ref. cat.)	0.33	0.47	
4. Managing position (non-management position = ref. cat.)	0.44	0.50	
Content factor			
5. Societal meaninglessness	7.70	1.67	.96
6. Client meaninglessness	7.73	1.53	.80
7. Discretion	3.28	1.81	.83
Context factor			
8. Turbulence during implementation	6.58	1.79	.88
9. Influence during implementation	4.47	1.90	.87
10. Subjective norm	4.81	1.44	.78
Personality characteristics factor			
11. Rebelliousness	4.80	0.92	.78
12. Rule compliance	5.53	1.39	.80
Proposed effect			
13. Change willingness	4.32	1.77	.85

Note. The mean for the scales (from nr. 5 on) are recoded into a 10-point-scale, to increase ease of interpretation.

Table 2 Correlations for the variables in the study

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Sex	1												
2. Age	-.34*	1											
3. Working (partly) independently	-.16*	.32*	1										
4. Management position	-.26*	.19*	-.05	1									
5. Societal meaninglessness	-.17*	.18*	.10*	.10*	1								
6. Client meaninglessness	-.12*	.17*	.07	.06	.69*	1							
7. Discretion	.07	-.01	.14*	-.12*	-.39*	-.43*	1						
8. Turbulence during implementation	-.05	.01	-.05	.04	.02	.06	-.17*	1					
9. Influence during implementation	.00	-.09*	.02	.03	-.28*	-.33*	.42*	-.16*	1				
10. Subjective norm	.04	-.10*	-.09*	-.02	-.47*	-.46*	.31*	-.05	.28*	1			
11. Rebelliousness	-.07	.08*	.09*	.08*	.02	.02	-.03	.13*	-.07	.07	1		
12. Rule compliance	.10*	-.01	-.03	-.04	-.12*	-.12*	.06	-.10*	.09*	.01	-.14*	1	
13. Change willingness	.16*	-.15*	-.06	-.01	-.57*	-.56*	.41*	-.05	.36*	.45*	-.10*	.18*	1

Note. * p < .01

As can be seen in Table 2, most bivariate correlations for the variables linked through our hypotheses were statistically significant and in the anticipated direction. For example, change

willingness was positively related to discretion, but negatively related to rebeliousness.

Self-reported data based on a single application of a questionnaire can result in inflated relationships between variables due to common method variance, i.e. variance that is due to the measurement method rather than the constructs themselves (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). We conducted a Harman one-factor test to evaluate the extent to which common method variance was a concern. A factor analysis was conducted on all items used to measure the variables covered by the hypotheses. We opted for a principle components analysis as this is seen as the preferred method when analysing more than 20 items. We further opted for oblique rotation because we expected, based on the proposed theoretical framework, the factors to be related. The factors together accounted for 68% of the total variance (using the 'eigenvalue > 1' criterion). The most significant factor did not account for a majority of the variance (only 18%). Given that no single factor emerged and the first factor did not account for a majority of the variance, common method variance does not seem to be a major concern here (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

4.2   Regression results

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the extent to which the various factors were able to predict change willingness. In the first model, we regressed change willingness onto the control variables. In the subsequent models, we added the content variables (model 2), the context variables (model 3) and the personality characteristics variables (model 3). In each step, the change in R^2 is calculated, and we determine whether each change is significantly different from zero.

In the first model, with only control variables in the equation, the (adjusted) R^2 was .03. Adding the content variables in the second model increased R^2 substantially, to .41. On inserting the organizational context variables in model three, the R^2 increased somewhat further, to .44. Lastly, by inserting the personality characteristics, the R^2 finally became .46. These increases were all significant. Thus, the combination of the various variables contributed considerably to the explanation of change willingness as experienced by public professionals. We can now consider the individual hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 predicts that societal meaninglessness will be negatively related to the professionals' willingness to implement DTCs. As
Table 3 shows, in the final step of the regression analysis societal meaninglessness is significantly negatively related to change willingness (β=-.25 p<.01). We see from the (relatively) high standardized beta that societal meaninglessness is especially influential.

The second hypothesis looks at the influence of client meaningless on change willingness. In our empirical analysis, we see that its influence is significant (β=-.20 p<.01). That is, when professionals do not see value in a policy for their own clients, they are less willing to implement this policy.

Hypothesis 3 examines the influence of discretion on the willingness of professionals to put effort in a policy. We hypothesized that when professionals experience more discretion, they will be more willing to put effort in a policy. Our results show that this is indeed the case: more perceived discretion heightens change willingness (β=-.13 p<.01).

Hypothesis 4 predicts that the degree of turbulence in an organization will be negatively related to change willingness. The direct effect of turbulence on change willingness was insignificant (β=.04 p=n.s.). Hence, the results did not support this hypothesis.

The fifth hypothesis looks at the professionals influence during the implementation of the policy by their organization. Our data indeed do show a positive relationship between

influence during organizational implementation and change willingness (β=.11 p<0.1). Hence, we did not reject this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 6 examines the last variable for the context of the organization: the subjective norm. In our empirical analysis, its influence on change willingness relationship is strong (β=.18 p<.01). That is, when significant others in the organization are more positive about a policy, the professionals themselves are also increasingly willing to put effort into implement this policy.

The seventh hypothesis concerns the relation between rebelliousness and change willingness. As could be expected from the literature in applied psychology, the results indicate that rebellious individuals are indeed less willing to change (here: to implement a new policy) (β=-.09 p<.01), even when a large number of other factors are controlled for.

Lastly, hypothesis 8 examines the influence of rule compliance on change willingness. . Public professionals scoring high on rule compliance feel that public rules and regulations should be adhered to. Based on this, we expect that these public professionals would also be more willing to implement a new governmental policy, unrelated to its content. In our empirical analysis, this expected relationship does indeed exist (β=.10 p<.01).

Table 3 Hierarchical regression analyses for variables predicting change willingness

	Model 1 – Including control variables	Model 2 – Including content variables	Model 3 – Including context variables	Model 4 – Including personality characteristics variables
Control variables				
Female	**.13***	.07	**.08***	**.07***
Male	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.
Age	**-.11***	-.04	-.02	-.03
Working (partly) independently	.00	-.01	.00	.01
Working in institution	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.
Managing position	.04	**.08***	.07	**.08***
Non-management position	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.
Content variables				
Societal meaninglessness		**-.31***	**-.26***	**-.25***
Client meaninglessness		**-.26***	**-.21***	**-.20***
Discretion		**.18***	**.13***	**.13***
Context variables				
Organizational turbulence			.02	.04
Influence during implementation			**.12***	**.11***
Subjective norm			**.16***	**.18***
Personality characteristics				
Rebelliousness				**-.09***
Rule compliance				**.10***
ΔR^2		.38*	.03*	.02*
Overall adjusted R^2	.03	.41	.44	.46

Note: Standardized beta-coefficients are presented. * p < .01.

The following criteria are met:
Criterion of independent residuals (Durbin-Watson 2.1, 1<criterion<3). Criterion of no multicollinearity (No VIF-values above 10 and average close to 1). No exclusion of influential outlying cases was required (using casewise diagnostics: 3.1% above standardized residual >|2|, Cook's distance max. 0.02 (criterion < 1). Criteria of homoscedasticity and normality met (graph of Zresidual against Zpredicted shows random array of points, change willingness histogram has a normal-type distribution and PP plot resembles a diagonal line).

4.3   Discussion

After reviewing the results of testing our hypotheses, we can construct Figure 2.

We firstly see that the content-factors are the most important. Further, we see that the most important factor in explaining change willingness turned out to be societal meaninglessness: the perception of professionals concerning the added value of a policy to socially relevant goals. Health professionals in our survey who felt that the policy did not contribute to the stated goals (such as efficiency and transparency), were far less willing to implement the policy.

Further, we see that some organizational factors proved to be important in this study. More (perceived) influence during the implementation in the organization and a positive subjective norm did increase the willingness to implement a policy. However, the degree of turbulence in an organization did not appear significant. When there were many other changes going on in the organization at the same time as the implementation of the new policy, this did not decrease the willingness to implement a new policy.

Finally, we see that the personality characteristics of the implementers are somewhat important in explaining why psychiatrists, psychologists and psychotherapists resist the DTC-policy. It seems that more rebellious health professionals are less willing to implement DTCs. When professionals score higher on rule compliance, on the other hand, their willingness to implement DTCs increases, even when all other variables are controlled for. They might be willing to implement such a policy, even when they do not see it as valuable. In so, it seems that personality characteristics of professionals should be taken into account when examining attitudes towards public policies.
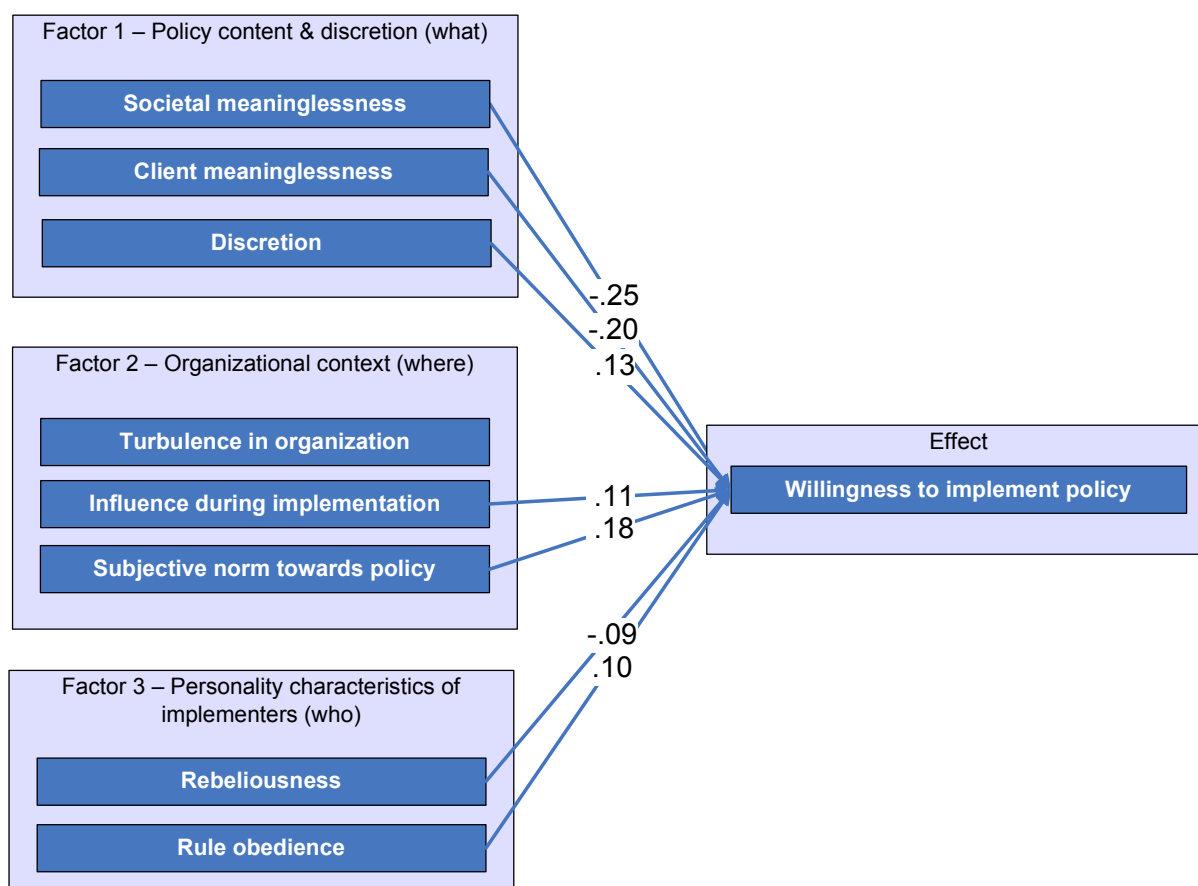

Figure 2 Final model, only paths that achieved significance at the .01 level or better are included

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5   Conclusions

Our main goal has been to quantitatively examine factors that influence the willingness, or reluctance, of public professionals to implement new policies. Based on literature from the public administration, change management and applied psychology, a theoretical model was constructed linking three factors (content, context and personality characteristics) to change willingness. This model was tested in a survey of 1317 mental healthcare professionals implementing a new reimbursement policy. The model worked adequately in that the factors, together with conventional control variables, explained over 40% of the variance in change willingness. The high internal consistency values (Cronbach alphas ranging from .78 to .96) and the satisfaction of regression criteria strengthens the reliability and validity of the study. As such, we can conclude that the quantitative, interdisciplinary, approach worked satisfactorily and adds to the literature concerning the attitudes of professionals towards public policies. Alongside this more general conclusion, we can draw two more-specific conclusions based on the theoretical framework and the empirical results.

Firstly, we observed that societal and client meaninglessness had the strongest influence on willingness to change. Professionals in our survey who felt that the policy did not contribute to the societal goals (such as efficiency, transparency and client choice) or to their own clients, were far less willing to implement the policy. This is an interesting observation, as it shows how important perceived added value of a policy is for professionals. However, the current debate on policy implementation is primarily focused on influence, autonomy and discretion of the implementers (Hill & Hupe, 2009; Meyers & Vorsanger, 2003). Our study shows that influence and discretion are indeed important, but that taking into account the perceived meaningfulness of a policy is essential. Hence, it seems logical that in future policy implementation research, more attention should be targeted towards the way professionals perceive the meaningfulness of a policy for society and for their own clients, and influencing the factors that determine this.

Secondly, we see that the subjective norm in an organization is an influential factor for explaining the willingness public professionals to implement new policies. This is consistent with social-information models, which suggest that individuals develop attitudes and behaviors in part as the result of the attitudes of their environment. This is also known more commonly as 'peer pressure' (Burkhardt, 1994). The significant relationship of the subjective norm can provide insight into the debate on public professionals in service delivery. This debate now often focuses on the experienced pressured of professionals. It is stated that they are pressured by many instances, such as the emancipation of clients, the demands of politicians and new policies, and the (ir)rationalities of their managers. Many professionals do feel this in this way, as is noted in the introduction. However, this also creates an environment and discourse of feeling pressured, which also influences professionals who do not feel this in such a way beforehand. The attitudes of the environment decreases the willingness of these professionals to implement changes, such as a new policy. As such, we note that some resistance among professionals for new policies is not rooted into content, 'real' pressures from the outside, or personality characteristics. It has more to do with the negatives attitudes of their environment: a 'negative discourse' is being created. This insight might help policy makers for developing interventions to counter the resistance of public professionals against numerous policies.

We can now examine possible directions for future research. A first area for further research would be to test the proposed model using other types of policies in a range of public domains. The results of this study, and the implications outlined, should be interpreted

in light of the study's limited context and sample. Although the study's generalizability was improved by the fact that the sample included a large number of public professionals, working in different positions and places, a limitation was that the model was only tested on one policy. One should be cautious in generalizing this to other public-sector policies or domains. A possible direction for further research would be to test the model using a comparative approach, examining multiple policies in various countries.

We end the article by providing a final, general, direction for future research. Looking at the results of our study, we see that all three factors are important for explaining willingness of professionals to implement public policies. Indeed, content, context, and individual characteristics-related factors have significant influences, independent of each other. This outcome indicates the complexity and multidimensional character of policy implementation and its impact on people's attitudes towards it. It suggests that one should not neglect any of these factors if one is trying to maximize professionals openness to a new policy (cf. Devos et al., 2007). Therefore, to increase the understanding of implementing public policies, research models should move beyond their current preoccupation with policy content and discretion, and more fully embrace issues of the organizational context and personality characteristics of implementers. This adds to the understanding of attitudes of professionals towards governmental policies.

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Explaining willingness of public professionals to implement public policies: Content, context and personality characteristics

Bram Steijn
Lars Tummers
Victor Bekkers

Dept. of Public Administration
Erasmus University Rotterdam
P.O. Box 1738
NL-3000 DR Rotterdam
Steijn@fsw.eur.nl
Tummers@fsw.eur.nl
Bekkers@fsw.eur.nl

Abstract

Currently, there is an intense debate on pressures facing public professionals. This debate often focuses on the (un)willingness of professionals - such as teachers and physicians - to implement new policies. In explaining this willingness, scholars often looked at the policy content, using qualitative case-studies. This has not led to a satisfactory explanatory framework. The aim of this research is twofold: (1) building a more all-encompassing, three-factor model (policy content, organizational context and personality characteristics of implementers) for explaining the willingness to implement policies; (2) quantitatively testing this model in a survey of 1.317 Dutch health professionals implementing a new reimbursement policy. The results show that policy content is the most important factor explaining this willingness. However, the organizational context and the personality characteristics of implementers are also influential, and have to be taken into account to properly study the attitudes of professionals towards public policies. The results of this research help in understanding why professionals embrace or resist implementing particular policies.

Keywords
1. Public professionals
2. Change Management
3. Policy implementation
4. Applied psychology
5. Personality characteristics of implementers

1 Introduction: Moving beyond the content of the policy?

At the moment, there is an intense debate going on concerning the pressures public professionals face in service delivery (Ackroyd et al., 2007; De Ruyter et al., 2008; Noordegraaf & Steijn, forthcoming 2011). The debate concerning these pressures is often focused on professionals executing public policies, such as teachers, welfare workers and physicians (Freidson, 2001; Knijn & Verhagen, 2007). These professionals seem to have problems with the policies they implement. For example, with the implementation of a new work disability decree in Dutch social security, about 240 insurance physicians urged a strike against this new policy, and some decided to simply quit their job (De Boer & Steenbeek, 2005). Another example is the introduction of a new reimbursement policy in Dutch mental healthcare (called Diagnose Behandeling Combinaties, or DBCs). In one large-scale survey, as many as 9 out of 10 professionals (mainly psychologists) wanted to abandon this policy and some openly demonstrated against it (Palm et al., 2008:11). Further, examples from Canada show that public professionals often do not accept new policies. As a result, they sometimes quit and start their own organizations (White, 1996). Hence, professionals often seem to be unwilling to implement new policies.

When public professionals are unwilling to implement public policies, this can have serious consequences. For instance, it can decrease the effectiveness of policy implementation. Sabatier (1986), for example, states as one of the necessary conditions for effective implementation 'committed and skilful implementers who apply themselves to using their discretion so as to realize policy objectives'. More recent policy implementation research continues to stress the importance of the willingness of the implementers (Ewalt & Jennings, 2004; May & Winter, 2009). As Ewalt & Jennings (2004:453) put it, 'It is clear from the literature there is much that members of an organization can do to stymie policy implementation.'

In trying to explain why public professionals resist implementing public policies, public administration research has often looked at the content of the policy, such as its goal or its characteristics (Winter, 2003). One important content-factor explaining unwillingness to implement policies looks at conflicting values. Scholars state that the values of contemporary policies – such as its focus on liberalization or efficiency – can conflict with professional values or the values of clients (Ackroyd et al., 2007; Freidson, 2001). Here, Emery and Giauque (2003:475) note that 'to focus on only the economic logic of action poses problems for public agents. They have to set aside some other shared values in order to concentrate solely on 'measurement management''. In so, role conflicts arise. In public administration research, these conflicts have been studied by several authors (Rizzo et al., 1970; Tummers et al., 2009).

Another important factor related to content is discretion. That is, the implementer has some freedom in terms of the type, quantity and quality of sanctions and rewards delivered, such as when a police officer decides whether to impose an on-the-spot fine (Lipsky, 1980). The discussion on discretion started from the concern of public administration lawyers about the possibility to control the implementation process, effectively opting for limiting discretion (for an overview, see Hill & Hupe, 2009:20-27). On the other hand, several scholars noted that a certain degree of discretion enables street-level officials to cope with the pressures they face (Lipsky, 1980; Riccucci, 2005). Further, for professionals implementing policies, it is noted that a low degree of discretion (or broader, low professional autonomy) can reduce their willingness to implement a policy (Freidson, 2001; Tummers, 2010). Hence, within the

field of public administration, an extensive literature has developed which examines discretion by street-level workers (Sandfort, 2000:730).

Whereas public administration has historically looked primarily at the content and discretion issues for explaining this willingness to implement public policies, it seems that this does not provide the full picture. To grasp this better, we have to look at the latest research in related disciplines. Here, scholars - from fields such as change management and applied psychology - note that is important to take several other factors into account, to properly explain willingness to implement policies. Here, they stress factors such as the organizational context and the personality characteristics of the implementers (Holt et al., 2006). Elaborating on this, Herold et al. (2007:950) state that

> We need to develop a greater understanding of the complexities of reactions to a particular change [such as a new policy]. Such reactions are a function not only of what is done and how it is done but also of the context in which it is done and the interaction of individuals' characteristics with that context. Embracing and further researching such complex change frameworks should prove to be a timely and productive endeavor for both researchers and practitioners.

To date, policy content & discretion, organizational context and the personality characteristics factors have not yet been included into a coherent framework for explaining the (un)willingness of public professionals to implement policies. Including additional factors can provide us with a broader, more all-encompassing, view at the experiences and attitudes of professionals towards governmental policies. This, in turn, can increase our understanding of professionals and their experienced pressures in public domains. In this paper, our goal is therefore to construct and test a more all-encompassing framework for analyzing the (un)willingness of public professionals to implement (governmental) policies.

We consider three possible groups of factors which can influence the (un)willingness of public professionals to implement public policies. The first factor examines the policy content and related discretion (the 'what') and is rooted in public administration literature. The second factor looks at the organizational context of implementation ('where'). This factor draws primarily from change management literature. Third, we examine the personality characteristics of the professionals ('who'), based on insights from applied psychology. By including these three factors we opt for a truly interdisciplinary approach, combining insights from different literature streams. In so, we follow Piderit (2000:784). She states that 'in other types of literature - not yet well integrated into research on resistance to change - scholars remind us of a wider range of reasons why employees may oppose a proposed organizational change'.

In so, we formulate the following research question:

What is the influence of 1. the policy content & discretion, 2. the organizational context and 3. the personality characteristics of the implementers on the willingness of public professionals to implement new public policies?

This brings us to the paper outline. First, we will discuss the theoretical framework, considering the relationships between the three explanatory factors and willingness to implement the policy. Second, we use a large scale survey to test the proposed explanatory framework. In July 2010, we conducted a survey among 1.317 Dutch psychologists, psychiatrists and psychotherapists implementing a new financial reward policy. The empirical

results – including hypothesis testing - are discussed. Third, we will discuss the limitations of this study, as well as its contribution to the debate of the pressures public professionals face.

2   Theoretical framework

In this section, we will build our theoretical framework. We firstly look at the dependent variable: the willingness of public professionals to implement public policies. This is done by reviewing insights from the change management literature, focusing on the concept of change willingness. Second, we look at the factors possibly influencing the willingness to implement public policies. This is structured using the three possible explanatory variables (content, context and personality characteristics of implementers).

2.1   Change management literature and change willingness

Early change management theories were based on the assumption that organizational change can be successfully planned by change managers. These are referred to as 'planned change' theories, and are often based on the seminal work of Lewin (1951). Lewin conceptualized change as progressing through successive phases labelled unfreezing, moving and refreezing. Building on this early work, others have described multi-phase models that change agents can follow in implementing changes (Galpin, 1996; Judson, 1991).

The planned change approach dominated the theory and practice of change management until the early 1980s. Since then, an 'emergent' change approach has become more prominent (Burnes, 2004; Kickert, in press). The emergent change approach does not consider change as a linear process, or an isolated event, but sees change as a continuous, recursive and unpredictable process. An emergent change process consists of a continuous sequence of autonomous, local initiatives. Change appears to be unplanned and unexpected (Weick, 2000). Weick argues that the 'planned change' view underestimates the value of innovative sense-making and the extent to which change is continuous and cumulative. That is, there is no deliberate orchestration of change, no dramatic discontinuity and no definitive steps in the change.

Although the planned and the emergent change approaches differ considerably, they both stress that willingness to implement a change by members of an organization is crucial. Metselaar (1997:42) defines this change willingness as 'a positive behavioural intention towards the implementation of modifications in an organization's structure, or work and administrative processes, resulting in efforts from the organization member's side to support or enhance the change process.' He constructed a reliable and valid scale for examining change willingness. According to planned change theories, an absence of willingness would result in a situation where top management's intentions to instil a change are not being transformed into real change efforts by lower echelons (Judson, 1991). According to academics belonging to the emergent school, unwillingness would impede the process of endless modifications, which would no longer accumulate and amplify. Indeed, throughout change management history it is has been fairly unambiguously claimed that a crucial condition for success is that employees are willing to implement the change (Carnall, 2007; Lewin, 1951).

In this paper, we will use the concept of change willingness to examine the willingness of public professionals to implement a particular public policy. In so doing, we draw on insights from change management literature - which has a long history of examining willingness to change – to examine policy implementation by public professionals.

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2.2   Choosing variables for building the theoretical framework

Having examined the background of willingness to change (here: to implement a new public policy), we can look at the factors possibly influencing this willingness. To gain insight in these factors, we have reviewed the literature in search of the variables most likely to be related to willingness to implement new policies. In so, we identified a number of variables belonging a) to the content factor, b) to the context factor and c) to the personality characteristics factor. These variables were chosen on the basis of three criteria: (a) there appeared to be a theoretical relationship between the variable and willingness to implement new policies (b) well-validated measures of the variables existed; and (c) construct validity evidence existed for these variables, and they had been used successfully in previous research (see also Judge et al., 1999).

By using this approach, this study is methodologically innovative. To date, most policy implementation studies have had a rather qualitative nature (O'Toole, 2000). The limited quantitative research which has been taken place, often fails to use validated scales, even those published in the top journals of the field (for example Cho et al., 2005; May & Winter, 2009). We use psychometrically scales and test the selected variables in a large-n study. This helps us to can achieve new, sound, insights concerning the experiences at the 'street-level', where public employees implement public policies.

2.3   Factor 1: Policy content & discretion

First, the content of the policy is considered. As noted, in trying to explain why public professionals resist implementing public policies, public administration research has often looked at the content of the policy, such as its goal or its characteristics (Winter, 2003). Based on the three criteria shown in the previous paragraph, we here focus on meaningfulness of a policy and discretion during its implementation.

For the meaningfulness factor, it seems that a strong theoretical relationship exists with the willingness of public professionals to implement public policies (Matland, 1995; Tummers et al., 2009). Ultimately, the goal of public policies is to make meaningful contributions to society, such as reducing crime rates or creating financial stability. For implementers, it is important to understand the contribution a policy makes towards these goals (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2003). Meaninglessness occurs when these implementers are unable to comprehend the contribution of the policy to a larger purpose.

Two types of meaninglessness can be considered (Tummers et al., 2009). Firstly, professionals can feel that implementing a policy is meaningless, if, it does not deliver any apparent beneficial outcomes for society as a whole (Van Thiel & Leeuw, 2002). This is termed societal meaninglessness, and is expected to decrease their willingness to implement a policy. When professionals perceive high societal meaninglessness, they are sensing that a policy program is not actually dealing with the provision of desirable public services, such as financial protection and security. As a result, they might wonder why they have to implement such a policy. That is, the benefits for society are unclear to them. This may lead them to resist the new policy, and exhibit a low degree of change willingness (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999) .

Second, client meaninglessness is also expected to negatively influence willingness to change of public professionals. May and Winter (2009) found that when frontline workers perceive the instruments they have at their disposal for implementing a policy as ineffective for their clients, this is likely to add to their frustrations. They do not see how their implementation of the proposed policy helps their clients, and so wonder why they should

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implement it. Given that the evaluation of effectiveness is likely to be based on on-the-job experience, rooted in the circumstances that professionals encounter in doing their job, this aspect of attitude is likely to be particularly important when it comes to determining attitudes and behaviours (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2003).

Further, we also examine one important factor related to the policy content; discretion (Hill & Hupe, 2009). More discretion is expected to be positively related to change willingness. In the policy implementation literature, it is suggested that an important positive factor affecting the attitudes of street-level public servants is the extent to which organizations delegate decision-making authority to the frontline (Meier & O'Toole, 2002). This influence may be particularly pronounced in professionals, whose expectations of discretion and autonomy contradict notions of bureaucratic control (DeHart-Davis & Pandey, 2005).

In sum, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Societal meaninglessness will be negatively related to change willingness.
H2: Client meaninglessness will be negatively related to change willingness.
H3: Discretion will be positively related to change willingness.

2.4 Factor 2: Organizational context

Next to the policy content, the organizational context is examined. It seems important to take this factor into account, as in organization theory it has long been argued that behavior and attitudes have to be understood in terms of the organizational environment or background of the organization (Dess & Beard, 1984; Lawrence & Lorsch, 2006 [1967]). However, examining the organizational context while studying the introduction of new policies, or changes in general, is relatively new and underdeveloped (Herold et al., 2007:943-944). Here, we try to fill this lacuna by including three possibly important aspects of the organizational context into account: the turbulence in an organization, influence of professionals during organizational implementation and the subjective norm towards the policy.

Organizational turbulence describes the extent to which other change events or environmental distractions provided a backdrop for the policy being implemented (Herold et al., 2007). High change turbulence occurs when employees face an organizational change, but at the same time are confronted with numerous other major changes occurring in their organization. Looking at the implementation of a new policy, high turbulence means that there are many other changes going on in the organization at the same time as the implementation of the new policy. These other changes represent additional distractions and adaptation demands for the professionals, who possess finite resources (such as time and effort). In such a situation a policy - which is for example seen as highly meaningful by professionals - may still suffer from a lack of support of these professionals, as they are already overloaded by other changes. Hence, we expect that when professionals experience high change turbulence, they will be less willing to implement a new policy.

Secondly, we examine employee influence over decisions how a change is executed within their own organization. Change management literature notes that an increase in employee influence on change decisions leads to increased commitment and performance, and reduces resistance to change (Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Judson (1991) went as far as to state that involving employees is perhaps the most powerful lever that management can

use to gain acceptance of change. In the realm of policy implementation, we therefore expect that the more professionals experience that they can influence the way the policy is implemented within their organization, the more they will be willing to implement the new policy.

Lastly, we take into account the subjective norm. In his seminal theory of planned behavior, Azjen describes subjective norm as 'the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform behavior' (1991:188). Ajzen notes that, as a general rule, the more positive the subjective norm in an organization with respect to a behavior, the stronger should be an individual's intention to perform the behavior. This subjective norm is based on the attitudes of significant others towards the behavior. Hence, social theories suggest that any individual's behavioral intention may be shaped by the attitude of significant others towards that behavior. In the case of professionals implementing a new policy, important significant others in the organization are their colleagues in their department, their subordinates, their managers and their board of directors. These constitute the (organizational) subjective norm for the professionals. We expect that a subjective norm in favor of the new policy will positively contribute to professionals' willingness to implement this policy. For instance, if a professional feels that his or her colleagues disapprove a new policy, parts of the subjective norm can be characterized as negative, making him or her more resistant towards implementing the new policy (see also Metselaar, 1997).

To sum up, it is hypothesized that:

H4: A higher degree of turbulence will be negatively related to change willingness.
H5: A higher degree of influence during organizational implementation will be positively related to change willingness.
H6: A subjective norm in favor of the policy will be positively related to change willingness.

2.5   Factor 3: Personality characteristics of the implementers

Lastly, we consider the personality characteristics of the professionals implementing the policy. Similar to the context of the organization, the personality characteristics of individuals have often been neglected in literature examining the attitudes towards changes. Here, Judge et al. (1999:107; see also Wanberg & Banas, 2000) note that 'very little research has taken a psychological focus in investigating the process of organizational change. Neglected is the possibility that successful coping with change lies within the psychological predispositions of individuals experiencing the change.' Here, we examine two personality traits.

Firstly, we take the notion of rebelliousness into account. Research involving rebelliousness – or psychological reactance – examines how individuals respond when their behavioural freedoms are restricted (Brehm, 1966). Rebelliousness can be considered a personality trait, in that some individuals interpret actions more as a threat to their freedom than others (Shen & Dillard, 2005). Scholars studying rebelliousness have shown that rebellious individuals -compared with non-rebellious individuals- are defensive, aggressive, dominant, autonomous, and non-affiliative (Dowd & Wallbrown, 1993). Further, rebelliousness was found to be negatively related to the readiness to change (Holt et al., 2006). Based on previous research on rebelliousness, we expect that rebellious individuals are likely to be more resistant to implement new policies. They might view a new policy as a threat towards their personal freedom and autonomy, and therefore be less willing to put effort into its implementation.

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Secondly, we take the notion of rule compliance into account. Rule compliance is broadly defined as the belief of an individual that people have to obey governmental rules (Clague, 2003). In public administration literature, a number of scholars stress the importance of the rule compliance concept (Lan & Rainey, 1992; Lipsky, 1980). Rule compliance is related to, but logically independent of, rebelliousness. Rebelliousness examines the individual proneness to see something as a threat to his or her own freedom. Rule compliance, on the other hand, examines the beliefs of that individual that persons (*he/she and others*) should adhere to (governmental) rules. Public professionals scoring high on rule compliance feel that public rules and regulations should be adhered to. Based on this, we expect that these public professionals who are highly rule-compliant also to be more willing to implement a new governmental policy, unrelated to its content.

Overall, it is hypothesized that:

H7: A higher degree of rebelliousness will be negatively related to change willingness.
H8: A higher degree of rule-compliance will be positively related to change willingness.

2.6   Theoretical framework

Figure 1 shows the overall theoretical model representing the hypotheses developed above. In the following sections, we present the methodology for testing this model and our empirical results.
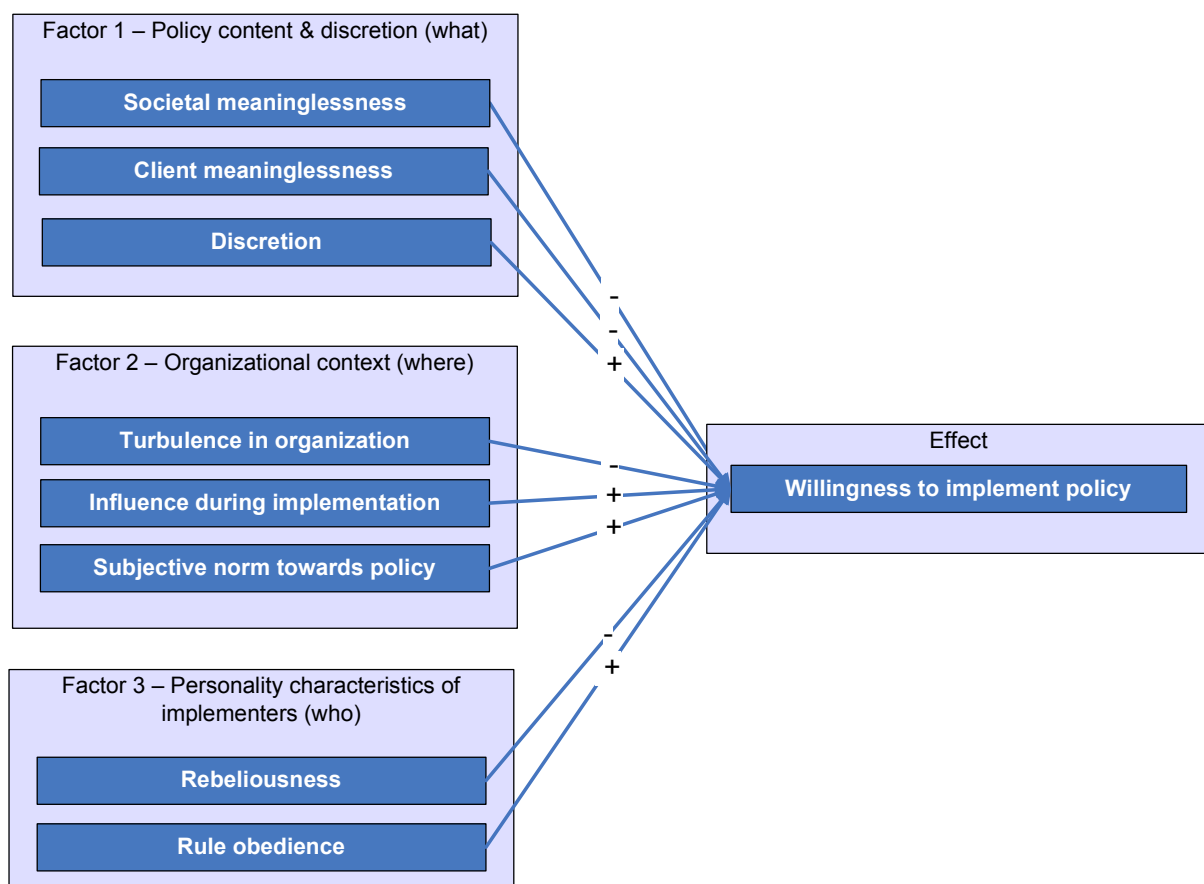

Figure 1 Theoretical framework for explaining willingness to implement new policies: policy content & discretion (what), organizational context (where) and personality characteristics (who)

3 Method

3.1 Testing the proposed model using the DTC policy

To test the proposed model, we undertook a survey of Dutch mental healthcare professionals implementing a new reimbursement policy. First, we provide a short overview of this policy.

In January 2008, the Health Insurance Law was introduced in the Netherlands. This was part of a process to convert the Dutch healthcare system into one based on a regulated market (Helderman et al., 2005). In the Health Insurance Law, a system of Diagnosis Treatment Combinations (DTCs) was developed as a means of determining the level of financial exchange for mental healthcare provision. The DTC policy differs significantly from the former method, in which each medical action resulted in a financial claim, i.e. the more sessions that a mental healthcare specialist had with a patient, the more recompense that could be claimed. According to some, this could lead to inefficiencies (Helderman et al., 2005; Kimberly et al., 2009). The DTC policy changed the situation by stipulating a standard rate for each disorder. The new Health Insurance Law and the associated DTCs can be seen as the introduction of regulated competition into Dutch healthcare, a move in line with NPM ideas. More specifically, it can be seen as a shift to greater competition and more efficient resource use (Hood, 1991:5).

We chose the DTC policy as the basis for testing our model for three reasons. Firstly, public professionals, here psychotherapists, psychologists and psychiatrists, will be the ones implementing the policy. Secondly, the DTC policy focuses strongly on economic goals, such as efficiency and client choice (Helderman et al., 2005), and earlier research indicates that policies which pursue these kinds of goals can create problems for professionals. As such, this policy fits therefore the research problem in hand. Thirdly, in numerous countries, there have been moves towards similar healthcare payment systems. In the early 1980s, Diagnostic Related Groups (DRGs) were developed in the USA to calculate cost prices for health 'products'. Since then, variants of the DRG system have been developed in Australia, Germany, England, Japan, Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands (Kimberly et al., 2009). This increases the possibility of generalizing the results of the analysis. Thus, overall, the DTC policy seems particularly appropriate for quantitatively examining factors that may influence the willingness of public professionals to implement new policies.

3.2 Sampling and response

We used a sampling frame of 5.199 mental health professionals, members of two nationwide mental healthcare associations (Nederlands Instituut van Psychologen and Nederlandse Vereniging voor Psychiatrie). These are all the members of these associations who could work with the DTC-policy. In the personalized email, we explained the purpose of the study, invited participation, and indicated that responses were confidential and would be analysed and presented anonymously. Using the email and two reminders, we received 1.317 full or partial returns of our questionnaire. Of those who did not complete the survey, 106 provided reasons. Some (34) did not work with DTCs for various reasons, for instance because DTCs were not yet implemented in their organization, or because their particular profession, such as primary healthcare, did not use DTCs. A number of them (25) responded that they had retired or changed occupation. These two groups were excluded from the sample. The overall response rate was thus 26%.

Gender composition of this group roughly equals the real distribution among Dutch mental healthcare professionals (Palm et al., 2008). Respondents' age was slightly higher than that of mental healthcare professional population (48 against 44). The educational levels were very high—24% had a minimally a bachelor's degree and 76% had undertaken graduate-level training or education (PhD or a specialisation). This is a clear indicator that we have indeed sampled health professionals who, in general, have a high educational level (Freidson, 2001).

3.3 Measures

Here, we report the measurement of our variables. All measures had adequate Cronbach alphas (ranging from .78 to .95), which are shown in the result section.

Factor 1 – Policy content

Societal meaninglessness
Tummers (2009) conceptualized societal meaninglessness as one of the dimensions of 'policy alienation'. Policy alienation is defined as a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the policy program being implemented by a public professional who, on a regular basis, interacts directly with clients. Policy alienation is conceptually associated with five dimensions: strategic powerlessness, tactical powerlessness, operational powerlessness (or discretion), societal meaninglessness and client meaninglessness. For these dimensions of policy alienation validated scales have been developed, which have shown good reliability (for a more elaborate discussion, see Tummers, 2009).

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

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

Discretion
Discretion concerns the (perceived) freedom of the implementer in terms of the type, quantity and quality of sanctions and rewards delivered (Lipsky, 1980). Discretion – or operational powerlessness - was measured using a six-item scale. Sample items were 'I have freedom to decide how to use DTCs (R)' and 'When I work with DTCs, I have to adhere to tight procedures'.

<u>Factor 2 – Organizational context</u>

Subjective norm
Subjective norm was measured using a validated five-item scale, developed by Metselaar (1997). As with the policy content scales, this scale uses templates in which one can specify the change being assessed. It examines the attitudes of five groups/individuals towards the policy: the board of directors, manager, colleagues, subordinates and others in the organizational unit. As such, sample items are: 'Please indicate how your colleagues feel about the DTC-policy' and 'Please indicate how your manager feels about the DTC-policy' (5-point scale, from very negative to very positive).

Turbulence in organization
To measure turbulence in an organization, we used the scale of Herold et al. (2007). This scale uses four items in order to capture the extent to which other change events or environmental distractions provided a backdrop for the change being studied. Some items for this scale were 'The introduction of DTCs occurred during a turbulent time for our work unit' and 'The introduction of DTCs would have been easier if we were not already dealing with a number of other changes'.

Influence during implementation
Influence of professionals during the implementation of the policy by the organization was measured using the concept of tactical powerlessness (which is the reverse of influence in the organization during implementation) (Tummers, 2009). These items tap into a professional's perceived influence on decisions concerning the way the DTC policy was implemented in their institution. Sample items were 'In my institution, especially mental healthcare professionals could decide how the DTC policy was implemented' and 'Mental healthcare professionals were not listened to over the introduction of the DTC policy in my institution'.

<u>Factor 3 – Personality characteristics</u>

Rebelliousness
We measured rebelliousness using a validated 11-item scale (Shen & Dillard, 2005). Here, Shen and Dillard note that using this 11-item scale is 'theoretically and empirically justifiable' (2005:80). Sample items are 'I become angry when my freedom of choice is restricted' and 'I resist the attempts of others to influence me'.

Rule compliance
Rule compliance is the individuals' beliefs about whether they are obliged to obey governmental rules. To measure rule compliance, we used the scale – consisting of five items - from the European Social Survey (Jowell, 2007). Here, sample items are 'A good citizen always complies with the rules and laws' ' and 'You always have to strictly abide the law, even it that means that will lose good opportunities as a result'.

<u>Effect & control variables</u>

Change willingness

Lastly, we measured change willingness using a validated five-item scale which has shown good reliability (Metselaar, 1997). This scale uses templates in which one can specify the change being assessed. Here, the change is the DTC-policy. As such, sample items are: 'I am willing to contribute to the introduction of DTCs' and 'I am willing to free up time to implement the DTC policy'. We see that here, we focus on 'intention to act'. In so, the proposed effect is conceptually different from the factors, which focus on attitudes and personality characteristics (Ajzen, 1991).

Control variables
Alongside the variables described above, we included commonly used control variables in our multivariate analysis. We included gender, age and management position (yes/no). Further, we used a variable showing whether a professional works (partly) independently or works only in an institution. This is taken into account, as professionals may come into contact differently with DTCs when they work independently.

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables are presented below:

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for the variables in the study

Variable	M	SD	Cronbach alpha
Control variables			NA
1. Sex (male = ref. cat.)	0.64	0.48	
2. Age	47.94	11.01	
3. Working (partly) independently (only in institution = ref. cat.)	0.33	0.47	
4. Managing position (non-management position = ref. cat.)	0.44	0.50	
Content factor			
5. Societal meaninglessness	7.70	1.67	.96
6. Client meaninglessness	7.73	1.53	.80
7. Discretion	3.28	1.81	.83
Context factor			
8. Turbulence during implementation	6.58	1.79	.88
9. Influence during implementation	4.47	1.90	.87
10. Subjective norm	4.81	1.44	.78
Personality characteristics factor			
11. Rebelliousness	4.80	0.92	.78
12. Rule compliance	5.53	1.39	.80
Proposed effect			
13. Change willingness	4.32	1.77	.85

Note. The mean for the scales (from nr. 5 on) are recoded into a 10-point-scale, to increase ease of interpretation.

Table 2 Correlations for the variables in the study

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Sex	1												
2. Age	-.34*	1											
3. Working (partly) independently	-.16*	.32*	1										
4. Management position	-.26*	.19*	-.05	1									
5. Societal meaninglessness	-.17*	.18*	.10*	.10*	1								
6. Client meaninglessness	-.12*	.17*	.07	.06	.69*	1							
7. Discretion	.07	-.01	.14*	-.12*	-.39*	-.43*	1						
8. Turbulence during implementation	-.05	.01	-.05	.04	.02	.06	-.17*	1					
9. Influence during implementation	.00	-.09*	.02	.03	-.28*	-.33*	.42*	-.16*	1				
10. Subjective norm	.04	-.10*	-.09*	-.02	-.47*	-.46*	.31*	-.05	.28*	1			
11. Rebelliousness	-.07	.08*	.09*	.08*	.02	.02	-.03	.13*	-.07	.07	1		
12. Rule compliance	.10*	-.01	-.03	-.04	-.12*	-.12*	.06	-.10*	.09*	.01	-.14*	1	
13. Change willingness	.16*	-.15*	-.06	-.01	-.57*	-.56*	.41*	-.05	.36*	.45*	-.10*	.18*	1

Note. * $p < .01$

As can be seen in Table 2, most bivariate correlations for the variables linked through our hypotheses were statistically significant and in the anticipated direction. For example, change

willingness was positively related to discretion, but negatively related to rebeliousness.

Self-reported data based on a single application of a questionnaire can result in inflated relationships between variables due to common method variance, i.e. variance that is due to the measurement method rather than the constructs themselves (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). We conducted a Harman one-factor test to evaluate the extent to which common method variance was a concern. A factor analysis was conducted on all items used to measure the variables covered by the hypotheses. We opted for a principle components analysis as this is seen as the preferred method when analysing more than 20 items. We further opted for oblique rotation because we expected, based on the proposed theoretical framework, the factors to be related. The factors together accounted for 68% of the total variance (using the 'eigenvalue > 1' criterion). The most significant factor did not account for a majority of the variance (only 18%). Given that no single factor emerged and the first factor did not account for a majority of the variance, common method variance does not seem to be a major concern here (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

4.2   Regression results

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the extent to which the various factors were able to predict change willingness. In the first model, we regressed change willingness onto the control variables. In the subsequent models, we added the content variables (model 2), the context variables (model 3) and the personality characteristics variables (model 3). In each step, the change in R^2 is calculated, and we determine whether each change is significantly different from zero.

In the first model, with only control variables in the equation, the (adjusted) R^2 was .03. Adding the content variables in the second model increased R^2 substantially, to .41. On inserting the organizational context variables in model three, the R^2 increased somewhat further, to .44. Lastly, by inserting the personality characteristics, the R^2 finally became .46. These increases were all significant. Thus, the combination of the various variables contributed considerably to the explanation of change willingness as experienced by public professionals. We can now consider the individual hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 predicts that societal meaninglessness will be negatively related to the professionals' willingness to implement DTCs. As Table 3 shows, in the final step of the regression analysis societal meaninglessness is significantly negatively related to change willingness (β=-.25 p<.01). We see from the (relatively) high standardized beta that societal meaninglessness is especially influential.

The second hypothesis looks at the influence of client meaningless on change willingness. In our empirical analysis, we see that its influence is significant (β=-.20 p<.01). That is, when professionals do not see value in a policy for their own clients, they are less willing to implement this policy.

Hypothesis 3 examines the influence of discretion on the willingness of professionals to put effort in a policy. We hypothesized that when professionals experience more discretion, they will be more willing to put effort in a policy. Our results show that this is indeed the case: more perceived discretion heightens change willingness (β=-.13 p<.01).

Hypothesis 4 predicts that the degree of turbulence in an organization will be negatively related to change willingness. The direct effect of turbulence on change willingness was insignificant (β=.04 p=n.s.). Hence, the results did not support this hypothesis.

The fifth hypothesis looks at the professionals influence during the implementation of the policy by their organization. Our data indeed do show a positive relationship between

influence during organizational implementation and change willingness (β=.11 p<0.1). Hence, we did not reject this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 6 examines the last variable for the context of the organization: the subjective norm. In our empirical analysis, its influence on change willingness relationship is strong (β=.18 p<.01). That is, when significant others in the organization are more positive about a policy, the professionals themselves are also increasingly willing to put effort into implement this policy.

The seventh hypothesis concerns the relation between rebelliousness and change willingness. As could be expected from the literature in applied psychology, the results indicate that rebellious individuals are indeed less willing to change (here: to implement a new policy) (β=-.09 p<.01), even when a large number of other factors are controlled for.

Lastly, hypothesis 8 examines the influence of rule compliance on change willingness. . Public professionals scoring high on rule compliance feel that public rules and regulations should be adhered to. Based on this, we expect that these public professionals would also be more willing to implement a new governmental policy, unrelated to its content. In our empirical analysis, this expected relationship does indeed exist (β=.10 p<.01).

Table 3 Hierarchical regression analyses for variables predicting change willingness

	Model 1 – Including control variables	Model 2 – Including content variables	Model 3 – Including context variables	Model 4 – Including personality characteristics variables
Control variables				
Female	**.13***	.07	**.08***	**.07***
Male	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.
Age	**-.11***	-.04	-.02	-.03
Working (partly) independently	.00	-.01	.00	.01
Working in institution	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.
Managing position	.04	**.08***	.07	**.08***
Non-management position	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.	Ref. cat.
Content variables				
Societal meaninglessness		**-.31***	**-.26***	**-.25***
Client meaninglessness		**-.26***	**-.21***	**-.20***
Discretion		**.18***	**.13***	**.13***
Context variables				
Organizational turbulence			.02	.04
Influence during implementation			**.12***	**.11***
Subjective norm			**.16***	**.18***
Personality characteristics				
Rebelliousness				**-.09***
Rule compliance				**.10***
ΔR^2		.38*	.03*	.02*
Overall adjusted R^2	.03	.41	.44	.46

Note: Standardized beta-coefficients are presented. * p < .01.

The following criteria are met:
Criterion of independent residuals (Durbin-Watson 2.1, 1<criterion<3). Criterion of no multicollinearity (No VIF-values above 10 and average close to 1). No exclusion of influential outlying cases was required (using casewise diagnostics: 3.1% above standardized residual >|2|, Cook's distance max. 0.02 (criterion < 1). Criteria of homoscedasticity and normality met (graph of Zresidual against Zpredicted shows random array of points, change willingness histogram has a normal-type distribution and PP plot resembles a diagonal line).

4.3   Discussion

After reviewing the results of testing our hypotheses, we can construct Figure 2.

We firstly see that the content-factors are the most important. Further, we see that the most important factor in explaining change willingness turned out to be societal meaninglessness: the perception of professionals concerning the added value of a policy to socially relevant goals. Health professionals in our survey who felt that the policy did not contribute to the stated goals (such as efficiency and transparency), were far less willing to implement the policy.

Further, we see that some organizational factors proved to be important in this study. More (perceived) influence during the implementation in the organization and a positive subjective norm did increase the willingness to implement a policy. However, the degree of turbulence in an organization did not appear significant. When there were many other changes going on in the organization at the same time as the implementation of the new policy, this did not decrease the willingness to implement a new policy.

Finally, we see that the personality characteristics of the implementers are somewhat important in explaining why psychiatrists, psychologists and psychotherapists resist the DTC-policy. It seems that more rebellious health professionals are less willing to implement DTCs. When professionals score higher on rule compliance, on the other hand, their willingness to implement DTCs increases, even when all other variables are controlled for. They might be willing to implement such a policy, even when they do not see it as valuable. In so, it seems that personality characteristics of professionals should be taken into account when examining attitudes towards public policies.
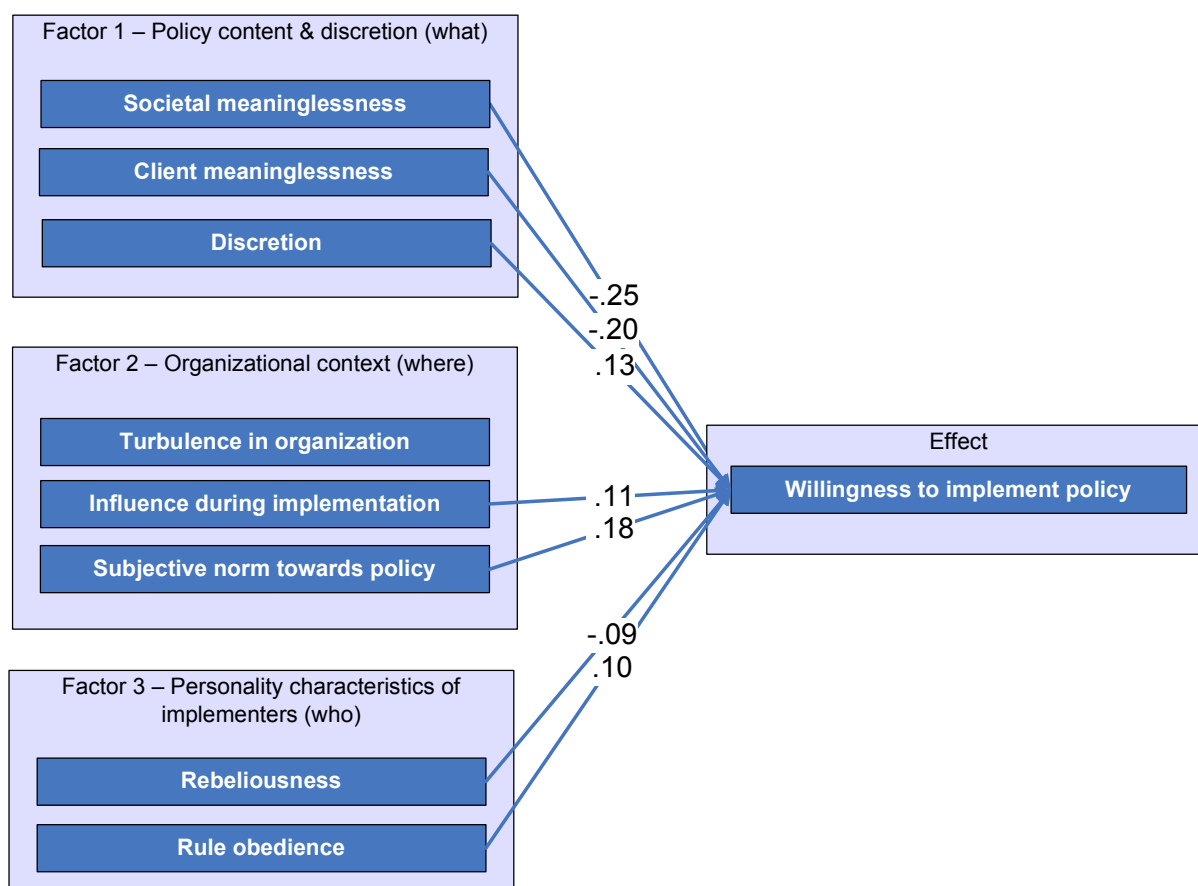

Figure 2 Final model, only paths that achieved significance at the .01 level or better are included

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5 Conclusions

Our main goal has been to quantitatively examine factors that influence the willingness, or reluctance, of public professionals to implement new policies. Based on literature from the public administration, change management and applied psychology, a theoretical model was constructed linking three factors (content, context and personality characteristics) to change willingness. This model was tested in a survey of 1317 mental healthcare professionals implementing a new reimbursement policy. The model worked adequately in that the factors, together with conventional control variables, explained over 40% of the variance in change willingness. The high internal consistency values (Cronbach alphas ranging from .78 to .96) and the satisfaction of regression criteria strengthens the reliability and validity of the study. As such, we can conclude that the quantitative, interdisciplinary, approach worked satisfactorily and adds to the literature concerning the attitudes of professionals towards public policies. Alongside this more general conclusion, we can draw two more-specific conclusions based on the theoretical framework and the empirical results.

Firstly, we observed that societal and client meaninglessness had the strongest influence on willingness to change. Professionals in our survey who felt that the policy did not contribute to the societal goals (such as efficiency, transparency and client choice) or to their own clients, were far less willing to implement the policy. This is an interesting observation, as it shows how important perceived added value of a policy is for professionals. However, the current debate on policy implementation is primarily focused on influence, autonomy and discretion of the implementers (Hill & Hupe, 2009; Meyers & Vorsanger, 2003). Our study shows that influence and discretion are indeed important, but that taking into account the perceived meaningfulness of a policy is essential. Hence, it seems logical that in future policy implementation research, more attention should be targeted towards the way professionals perceive the meaningfulness of a policy for society and for their own clients, and influencing the factors that determine this.

Secondly, we see that the subjective norm in an organization is an influential factor for explaining the willingness public professionals to implement new policies. This is consistent with social-information models, which suggest that individuals develop attitudes and behaviors in part as the result of the attitudes of their environment. This is also known more commonly as 'peer pressure' (Burkhardt, 1994). The significant relationship of the subjective norm can provide insight into the debate on public professionals in service delivery. This debate now often focuses on the experienced pressured of professionals. It is stated that they are pressured by many instances, such as the emancipation of clients, the demands of politicians and new policies, and the (ir)rationalities of their managers. Many professionals do feel this in this way, as is noted in the introduction. However, this also creates an environment and discourse of feeling pressured, which also influences professionals who do not feel this in such a way beforehand. The attitudes of the environment decreases the willingness of these professionals to implement changes, such as a new policy. As such, we note that some resistance among professionals for new policies is not rooted into content, 'real' pressures from the outside, or personality characteristics. It has more to do with the negatives attitudes of their environment: a 'negative discourse' is being created. This insight might help policy makers for developing interventions to counter the resistance of public professionals against numerous policies.

We can now examine possible directions for future research. A first area for further research would be to test the proposed model using other types of policies in a range of public domains. The results of this study, and the implications outlined, should be interpreted

in light of the study's limited context and sample. Although the study's generalizability was improved by the fact that the sample included a large number of public professionals, working in different positions and places, a limitation was that the model was only tested on one policy. One should be cautious in generalizing this to other public-sector policies or domains. A possible direction for further research would be to test the model using a comparative approach, examining multiple policies in various countries.

We end the article by providing a final, general, direction for future research. Looking at the results of our study, we see that all three factors are important for explaining willingness of professionals to implement public policies. Indeed, content, context, and individual characteristics-related factors have significant influences, independent of each other. This outcome indicates the complexity and multidimensional character of policy implementation and its impact on people's attitudes towards it. It suggests that one should not neglect any of these factors if one is trying to maximize professionals openness to a new policy (cf. Devos et al., 2007). Therefore, to increase the understanding of implementing public policies, research models should move beyond their current preoccupation with policy content and discretion, and more fully embrace issues of the organizational context and personality characteristics of implementers. This adds to the understanding of attitudes of professionals towards governmental policies.

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