

## **Policy alienation and work alienation: Two worlds apart?**

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Chaired by: Walter Kickert, Malcom Higgs and Ben Kuipers

Lars (L.G.) Tummers, Sandra (S.) van Thiel, Bram (A.J.) Steijn, Victor (V.J.J.M.) Bekkers

Dept. of Public Administration

Erasmus University Rotterdam

P.O. Box 1738

NL-3000 DR Rotterdam

[Tummers@fsw.eur.nl](mailto:Tummers@fsw.eur.nl)

[Vanthiel@fsw.eur.nl](mailto:Vanthiel@fsw.eur.nl)

[Steijn@fsw.eur.nl](mailto:Steijn@fsw.eur.nl)

[Bekkers@fsw.eur.nl](mailto:Bekkers@fsw.eur.nl)

## **Abstract**

The notion of work alienation has been fascinating scholars and practitioners for a long time. In recent years, a related concept has been developed in the public administration discipline: policy alienation, which examines the alienation of public professionals from the policy they have to implement. In this paper, our goal is to study the distinctiveness (or similarity) of work alienation and policy alienation. Furthermore, we examine a number of effects of work and policy alienation. Based on a theoretical framework and a survey of 790 Dutch midwives, we show that work and policy alienation are clearly distinct concepts. Furthermore, we show that work alienation has a strong impact on work level outcomes, such as work effort and intention to leave the organization. Policy alienation strongly influences the intention of a worker to resist a new policy, and the related behavior. Hence, work and policy alienation have important but separate effects. This study underscores the usefulness of work and policy alienation for sociological and public administration research.

## 1 Introduction

The alienation of employees from their work has been intriguing scholars and practitioners for a long time. One of the main writers on alienation is Karl Marx (1961 [1844]). Marx was inspired by the works of Hegel and Moses Hess. But Marx was innovative in using the alienation concept in an economic way: alienation of labor (Kanungo, 1982:13; Vincent, 1989:22). For Marx, all sources of alienation enact from economic phenomena, such as wage labor and the division of labor. In those new, industrial times, Marx noticed that labor in itself has become alienating. Workers were alienated because they do not own the resulting product of their labor, or the tools for processing these products.

Nowadays, the concept of work alienation is used by scholars from various disciplines, such as psychology and sociology of work and organization (Kanungo, 1982; Nair & Vohra, 2010; Sarros, Tanewski, Winter, Santora, & Densten, 2002). However, they differ in one important respect from Marx. While Marx looked at *objective* work alienation (that is, workers are alienated because they do not for instance own a product), contemporary scholars examine *subjective* work alienation. That is, workers *feel* alienated from their work (Kanungo, 1982:19).

Also in the public administration literature, the concept of work alienation has not gone unnoticed. A number of scholars have used the concept, drawing on the alienation literature developed in both sociology and psychology. For instance, DeHart-Davis and Pandey (2005:134) have studied subjective work alienation, which they conceptualize “as a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from work” (see also Kanungo, 1979:131). Furthermore, Pandey and Kingsley (2000) have examined work alienation and have shown that work alienation is a strong predictor of the degree of red tape public employees experience.

Recently, we have developed a new concept related to work alienation, termed 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 (Tummers, Bekkers, & Steijn, 2009). Although this concept has close links with subjective work alienation, it is theoretically different. Most importantly, it looks at alienation from the policy being implemented, rather than from the job being done. Furthermore, it focuses on professionals, while the (traditional) alienation literature looked mostly at blue collar workers.

However, while the work and policy alienation concepts are theoretically different, it is unclear if this distinctiveness also holds on in the ‘empirical world’. In this paper, our main goal is to examine the distinctiveness of policy alienation and work alienation. Furthermore, we study the effects of both work and policy alienation. We will examine the influence of work and policy alienation on two important outcomes on the job level: work effort (Gould-Williams, 2003) and intention to leave the organization (Bozeman & Perrewé, 2001). Second, we will examine their influence on two outcome on the policy level: willingness/resistance to implement a policy (Judson, 1991; Metselaar, 1997) and behavioral support for a policy (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002).

Examining the relationships and effects of work alienation and policy alienation is interesting for scholars. First, it can provide further evidence on the construct validity of the policy alienation concept (DeVellis, 2003; Tummers, forthcoming 2012). We expect that policy alienation and work

alienation correlate, but only to a limited degree. We also expect that they have different effects, thereby showing evidence of their distinctiveness (or similarity). Second, we can examine whether work and/or policy alienation significantly affects work effort, intention to leave and willingness to implement policies. When their influence is strong, this underscores the usefulness of these concepts for sociological and public administration research.

This study also has relevance for policymakers and managers. For instance, should managers focus on work or policy alienation (or neither) when lowering resistance to a specific policy? Some practitioners note that resistance against policies is not so much explained by the policy itself, but far more by the negative way many employees perceive their work (Peters & Pouw, 2005). By theoretically and empirically distinguishing between the work level and the policy level, we can study these kind of claims.

This brings us to the outline of this article. In Section 2, we describe the work alienation and policy alienation concepts. We derive hypotheses concerning their interrelationships and their influence on important work level indicators (work effort and intention to leave) and policy level indicators (willingness to implement and behavioral support for the policy). In Section 3, the method established for testing these hypotheses is outlined. In May 2011, we conducted a national Dutch survey among 1,278 midwives (respondents: 790, response rate 61%). The results of the survey – including hypothesis testing - are shown in Section 4. We conclude by discussing the contribution of this article to the public administration literature and to the debate on alienation of public professionals.

## 2 Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Work alienation and policy alienation

Alienation broadly refers to a sense of social estrangement, an absence of social support or meaningful social connection. Sociologists, public administration scholars, and other social scientists have used the alienation concept in various studies. As a result, a number of meanings have been attributed to the term (Kanungo, 1982:24). In an attempt to provide clarity, Seeman (1959) – in a landmark article - broke these meanings down into five alienation dimensions: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement. Given that there is no theoretical structure linking these five dimensions, and that the presence of all the dimensions is not required, scholars are effectively free to choose which dimensions best fit their research context (Rayce, Holstein, & Kreiner, 2008).

Many scholars have used these dimensions to devise operational measures for alienation so that they can examine the concept in a range of settings. Mau (1992), for example, used four dimensions in examining student alienation. Rayce et al. (2008), when investigating adolescent alienation, used three of the five dimensions. Further, many other researchers have used Seeman's classification in examining the concept of work alienation. An important study here is that of Blauner (1964), who devised operational measures for three of the dimensions: powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social isolation.

Next to the work alienation concept, we will use the concept of policy alienation (Tummers et al., 2009; Tummers, 2011). Like work alienation, policy alienation is multidimensional, consisting of policy powerlessness and policy meaninglessness dimensions (for a more elaborate explanation, see Tummers, forthcoming 2012).<sup>1</sup> In the work alienation literature, the dimensions of powerlessness and meaninglessness are also considered very important (Kanungo, 1982; Seeman, 1959). For instance, DeHart-Davis and Pandey (2005:133) consider powerlessness and meaninglessness “the key psychological ingredients of alienation”. Given these considerations, we will take the powerlessness and meaninglessness dimensions into account, both on a work level (work alienation) and on a policy level (policy alienation).

In essence, powerlessness is a person's lack of control over events in their life. Regarding work alienation, Shepard (1971:13-14) defines powerlessness as “the perceived lack of freedom and control on the job”. That is, workers feel themselves to be a thing, an object controlled and manipulated by others or an impersonal system. In the realm of policy formulation and implementation, policy powerlessness relates to the degree of influence public professionals have over shaping a *policy program* (Lynch, Modgil, & Modgil, 1997:62).

The second dimension of (work and policy) alienation is meaninglessness. In general, Seeman (1959:786) notes that meaninglessness refers to the individual's sense of understanding of the events in which he or she is engaged. In the work setting, meaninglessness may occur “when workers are not able to understand the complex system of goals in the organization and its relationship to their own work” (Kanungo, 1982:26). In the realm of policy making and implementation, policy meaninglessness refers to a professional's perception of the contribution that the policy makes to a greater purpose, most notably to society or to their own clients. For instance, a professional can feel that implementing a policy is meaningless, if it does not deliver any apparent beneficial outcomes for society, such as more safety on the streets (Van Thiel & Leeuw, 2002).

Based on this discussion, we see that work and policy alienation are related, but distinct concepts. They are both based on a solid alienation tradition. Furthermore, they both use powerlessness and meaninglessness dimensions and are subjective in nature (they examine perceptions). However, they focus on clearly distinct levels. While the work alienation term looks at the general (work) level, the policy alienation term examines alienation at the more specific (policy) level. As a result, it could be the case that a worker feels alienated from a certain policy, but not from his work. An example is a insurance physician who cannot identify with a new policy focused on stricter rules for granting workers a work disability benefit, but is in general very happy and involved in his work. On the other hand, a teacher can be alienated from his work in general, but still derive some satisfaction from a new policy which gives increased attention to helping children with learning disabilities. Based on this discussion, we hypothesize that also in the empirical analyses, the concepts of work alienation and policy alienation can be clearly distinguished. Hence, we hypothesize that:

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<sup>1</sup> The policy alienation concept furthermore distinguishes between sub-dimensions, that is, strategic, tactical and operational powerlessness, and societal and client meaninglessness. We also conducted the statistical analyses on the level of these sub-dimensions. However, this did not alter our conclusions. Therefore, we have not taken these sub-dimensions into account, as it needlessly complicates the discussion between work and policy alienation and does not alter our results.

## H1: Work alienation and policy alienation are distinct concepts

### 2.2 Influences at the work level: Work effort and intention to leave

We want to study two possible effects of work and policy alienation. First, we look at two important effects on a work level: work effort and intention to leave a job. We chose for these effects as they can be considered important for organizational performance. Examining work effort, McAllister (1995:33) notes that employees need to exert extra effort if higher levels of performance are to be achieved: "organizations depend on the discretionary contributions of their members to maintain efficiency and coordination; one has only to witness the disruption that occurs when employees limit their contributions exclusively to what is specified in their job descriptions to realize that this is the case". Hence, it seems that it is paramount for organizations that employees 'go the extra mile'. However, Kinicki et al. (1992, see also Gould-Williams, 2003) argue that there appears to be a growing trend among workers to under-perform, or to exert as little effort as possible. It therefore seems important to study the effort workers put in their work, and which factors influence the level of effort.

Intention to leave refers to the desire of an employee to quit their current job. Of course, this does not mean that all employees who intend to leave their job will actually do so (Allen, Weeks, & Moffitt, 2005). Nevertheless, scholars and human resource managers often treat turnover intentions as the most direct precursor of turnover behavior (see also Ajzen, 1991). Furthermore, a number of studies found that intention to leave one's position is a good proxy indicator for actual turnover (Bluedorn, 1982; Lee & Mowday, 1987). When employees leave their job, this is an important event. For organizations, it can incur substantial costs, such as leaving fees, recruiting and hiring new employees, the loss of tacit knowledge and continuity problems.

We expect that the dimensions of alienation (especially of work alienation) negatively influence the degree of effort workers put in their work. Cummings and Manring (1977) note that powerlessness and meaninglessness were negatively related to self-related effort and performance. Arnold et al. (2007:195) note that "Higher purpose [or less meaninglessness] was associated with increased job satisfaction, perceptions of unit cohesion, and work effort". Furthermore, Hackman and Oldham (1980) argue that autonomy and experienced meaningfulness in work are expected to increase high internal work motivation, which is strongly related to work effort.

We also expect that the dimensions of alienation (especially the work alienation dimensions) positively influence the intention to leave for employees. The mechanism which relates powerlessness to intention to leave can be traced back to the human relations movement (McGregor, 1960). One of the central tenets of this movement is that employees have a right to have input into decisions that affect their lives. Employees enjoy carrying out the decisions they were involved in making. Also, employees can reach recognition when they are granted the opportunity to make decisions themselves. This recognition is known to motivate and satisfy employees, making them less inclined to leave. In so, the human relations movement predicts that when employees experience powerlessness, this increases their intention to leave, as intrinsic employee needs are not fulfilled (Wagner III, 1994).

Examining the influence of meaninglessness on intention to leave, we expect that meaningless work increases the intention to leave. Hackman and Oldham (1976), using their Job Diagnostic Model, argue that one of the three critical states for personal and work outcomes (such as intention to stay) is experienced meaningfulness of work.

In sum, we expect that when employees experience powerlessness and meaninglessness, they will (a) put less effort in their work and (b) are more inclined to leave their job. More specifically, we expect that this is particularly true for experienced *work* powerlessness and meaninglessness, and less for *policy* powerlessness and meaninglessness. This is because work effort and intention to leave are measured on the general, work, level, consonant with the work alienation dimensions. In contrary, the dimensions of policy alienation are measured on the policy level. This corresponds with the statement of Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), who note that variables relate most strongly to one another when they are on the same level of specificity. Consequently, we develop the following two hypotheses:

H2: The dimensions of work alienation have a higher influence on work effort than the dimensions of policy alienation

H3: The dimensions of work alienation have a higher influence on intention to leave than the dimensions of policy alienation

### 2.3 Influences at the policy level: Willingness to implement and behavioral support

Work effort and intention to leave are measured on the work level. Next to this, we take into account two important effects which are measured on the policy level, that is, willingness to implement the policy and behavioral support for the policy.

These two concepts are both derived from the change management literature, which has a long history of examining willingness or resistance to changes, such as a new policy. Metselaar (1997:42) defines change willingness as “a positive behavioral 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.” Throughout change management history, it has been fairly unambiguously claimed that a crucial condition for success is that employees are willing to implement the change (Higgs & Rowland, 2005; Judson, 1991). In this case, the change refers to the policies the professionals have to implement.

Behavioral support for a change (in this case, a policy) considers the actions that employees take to support or resist a change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). For instance, professionals may go above and beyond what is formally required to ensure the success of a policy and promoting it to others. This is termed ‘championing’. At the other end of the continuum, professionals can demonstrate strong opposition in response to a new policy by engaging in overt behaviors that are intended to ensure that the policy fails. An example is the reaction of some psychologists and psychotherapists regarding the DRG-policy ([www.dbcvrij.nl](http://www.dbcvrij.nl)), Palm et al. (2008), see also chapter 6). These professionals demonstrated against this policy, and established associations which explicitly ran against the policy, such as the Foundation of DRG-free practices.

Behavioral support for the policy is related to, but logically independent of, willingness to implement a policy. Behavioral support for the policy examines the behavior of professionals regarding a policy, such as compliance or championing. Willingness to implement, on the other hand, examines the *intention to put effort* towards the implementation of a policy. For instance, two professionals may be equally intent to put effort in implementing a policy (same level of willingness to implement), but one professionals may be just compliant (medium level of behavioral support), while the other persuades his/her colleagues to embrace the change (high level of behavioral support).

We expect that when the degree of (policy) powerlessness or meaninglessness increases, the willingness to implement a policy and the behavioral support decreases. Examining powerlessness, it is well-established that an increase in employee influence on change decisions leads to increased commitment and performance, and reduces resistance to change (Tummers, 2011; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). For instance, Sagie and Koslowsky (1994) reported on influence in decision-making being positively related to acceptance among individual employees from five Israeli public organizations.

In the change management literature, the notion of a 'case for change' is closely related to the meaninglessness concept. In both theory and practice, it is often noted that a case for change has to be vehemently made if it is to increase willingness to implement a change and the associated behavioral support (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). This case for change can stress that there are better ways of doing things - better for the organization, better for the employees and better for customers. Developing a case for change is often an important step in planned change approaches. For instance, Higgs and Rowland (2005:127) note that creating a case for change is the first area of leadership competency to be associated with successful change implementation. If employees agree that a change has good and necessary objectives, they should be more supportive of this change. This means that, when employees experience that the policy is meaningful, they will be more willing to implement it and will show more positive behavior regarding the policy.

As can be seen from the discussion above, the relationship between powerlessness, meaninglessness and willingness to implement the policy and behavioral support for the policy seems particularly applicable to *policy* powerlessness and meaninglessness, and less so for *work* powerlessness and work meaninglessness. Hence, we hypothesize the following:

H4: The dimensions of policy alienation have a higher influence on the willingness to implement the policy than the dimensions of work alienation.

H5: The dimensions of policy alienation have a higher influence on behavioral support for the policy than the dimensions of work alienation.

### **3 Method**

#### **3.1 Testing the proposed model using a survey of Dutch midwives**

To test the hypotheses, we undertook a survey of Dutch midwives. Midwives offer care to childbearing women during pregnancy, labor and birth, and during the postpartum period. A practitioner of

midwifery is known as a midwife, a term used in reference to both women and men, although the majority is female.

In the Netherlands, midwives have to implement a governmental policy, called 'structural ultrasound research' (Structureel Echoscopisch Onderzoek, SEO), or 20-weeks echo. From 2007 on, this 20-weeks echo is part of the Law on Medical Examination of the Population (WBO, Wet Bevolkingsonderzoek) as has been recorded in the Dutch State journal 'Staatsblad', 1997, 581. When a woman is 20-22 weeks pregnant, she visits a midwife who, using ultrasound techniques, examines the unborn child. The midwife examines the health of the child, especially his or her physical development. Midwives also look at the growth of the child and determine whether there is sufficient amniotic fluid. This echo can be very important for the parents and the unborn child. First, defects may be detected which can already be treated when the child is still unborn. Second, it can be convenient that some defects are known before birth, so measures can be taken after birth. Third, in the Netherlands it is possible that the parents decide to have an abortion, based on the results of the 20-weeks echo. This is considered a drawback of the policy by some midwives. Fourth, midwives notice that a 20-weeks echo can generate a lot of anxiety for the parents, as defects can be detected. But as not everything is already clearly visible at 20 weeks pregnancy, this anxiety is sometimes unfounded. All in all, it seems that the 20-weeks echo is a significant policy, and midwives can have opinions regarding this policy. We will examine the degree of policy alienation of midwives from this 20-weeks echo policy, and its effects.

### 3.2 Sampling and response

To study work alienation, policy alienation and its effects, we used a sample of 1,278 midwives, based on the databases of the nationwide associations for midwives (KNOV) and midwife ultrasound specialists (BEN). We asked the midwives to respond to the online survey, using an introductory email (directly where possible, otherwise via the organization) and two reminders. Furthermore, our student-assistant contacted all organizations via telephone and asked them to stimulate their employees to fill in the survey. Based on these efforts, we received 790 returns of our questionnaire, a response of 61%.

Our student-assistant phoned a number of midwives who did not complete the survey about the reasons why did not participate (a non-response research). The non-response research did not indicate any possible biases in our sample. The most important reasons were (a) current workload (no priority), (b) the fact that they did already fill out a number of surveys and (c) not working with the 20 weeks echo.

Of the valid respondents, 22 (2,8%) were men and 768 (97,2%) women. This balance is consistent with Dutch averages for midwives, which is a traditional female occupation. According to a yearly national survey of the research institution Nivel, 98% of the midwives are female (Nivel, 2010). The respondents' average age was 40, which is comparable to the Dutch national average for this group, which is 37 (Nivel, 2010). Hence, the respondents mean age and gender-distribution are similar to those of the overall population of midwives.

### 3.3 Measures

#### *Work alienation – Powerlessness*

Work powerlessness was measured using a scale developed by Mottaz (1981). Sample items are "My daily tasks are largely determined by others" and "I have a good deal of freedom in the performance of my daily task" (R). In our study, the Cronbach alpha was adequate (.77).

#### *Work alienation – Meaninglessness*

We also used the study of Mottaz to measure work meaninglessness. Sample items were "Sometimes I am not sure I completely understand the purpose of what I'm doing", "I often wonder what the importance of my job really is" and "My work is really important and worthwhile" (R). In the current study, the Cronbach alpha for this scale was .85.

#### *Policy alienation – Powerlessness*

Tummers (forthcoming 2012) measured policy powerlessness. He distinguished between three strategic, tactical and operational powerlessness. In this study, we combine these three levels to one measure of policy powerlessness. Here, we follow the recommendations of Tummers (forthcoming 2012) on how to average the three levels to one measure of powerlessness. Sample items were "When I work with the policy [here: 20-weeks echo], I have to adhere to tight procedures" and "In my opinion, employees [here: midwives] had too little power to influence the policy". The Cronbach alpha for this scale was .82.

#### *Policy alienation - Meaninglessness*

In order to measure policy meaninglessness, we also followed the policy meaninglessness scales as developed by Tummers (forthcoming 2012). Sample items were "The policy is contributing to the welfare of my clients" (R) and "As a result of the policy, I can help clients better than before" (R). For this scale, the Cronbach alpha was .87.

#### *Intention to leave*

Intention to leave was measured using the scale of Bozeman & Perrewé (2001). Sample items are "I will probably look for a new job in the near future" and "I do not intend to quit my job" (R). In the present study, the Cronbach alpha for this scale was .89.

#### *Work effort*

In order to study work effort, we used the work of Gould-Williams (2004), who developed an eight-item measure to capture employee discretionary effort. Sample items are "I stay late if necessary to help out" and "I volunteer for things that are not part of the job". For our study, the scale's Cronbach's alpha was .76.

### *Willingness to implement policy*

We measured willingness to implement the policy using a five-item scale which has shown good reliability (Metselaar, 1997). Metselaar developed the concept 'willingness to change'. In this case, the change refers to the 20-weeks echo. Sample items are: "I am willing to contribute to the change [20-weeks echo]" and "I am willing to free up time to implement the change [20-weeks echo]". The scale's Cronbach's alpha was .85.

### *Behavioral support for the policy*

Behavioral support for the policy was measured based on the work of Herscovitch and Meyer (2002). They developed the concept 'behavioral support for the change', which reflects a range of resistance and support behavior. In this case, the change refers to the policy the 20-weeks echo. Behavioral support for the change is measured using a 101-behavioral continuum. Based on Herscovitch and Meyer, anchor points along the continuum were labeled from left to right as active resistance, passive resistance, compliance, cooperation, and championing. Furthermore, a written description of each of the anchors was provided. Active resistance was defined as demonstrating opposition in response to the 20-week echo by engaging in overt resistant behaviors, such as demonstrations. Passive resistance was defined as demonstrating opposition in response to the 20 weeks echo by engaging in covert or subtle behaviors aimed at preventing the success of this policy. Compliance was defined as demonstrating minimum support for the policy by going along with it, but doing so reluctantly. Cooperation was defined as demonstrating support for the 20 weeks echo by exerting effort when it comes to this policy, going along with the spirit of it, and being prepared to make modest sacrifices. Championing was defined as demonstrating extreme enthusiasm for the 20 weeks echo by going above and beyond what is formally required to ensure the success and promoting the 20 weeks echo to others. Scores from 0 to 20 corresponded to active resistance, scores from 21 to 40 corresponded to passive resistance, scores from 41 to 60 corresponded to compliance, scores from 61 to 80 corresponded to cooperation, and scores from 81 to 100 corresponded to championing. The respondents indicated a number (between 0 and 100) that best represented their reaction to the 20-weeks echo.

### *Control variables*

Alongside the variables described above, we included commonly used control variables in our regression. That is, any differences due to these variables are controlled for in the analyses.. We took into account gender, age, management position (yes/no) and level of education. We coded the level of education as follows: 1=elementary school, 2=secondary education, 3= intermediate vocational training (Dutch: MBO), 4= higher professional education (Dutch: HBO), 5=academic education (Dutch: WO) and 6=post academic education (PhD or specialization).

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Descriptive statistics and the relationship between work alienation and policy alienation

Descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics and correlations for the variables in the study

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Female (male=ref.cat)	.97	NA	1											
2. Age	4.1	1.9	<b>-.14**</b>	1										
3. Education	4.1	.4	.02	<b>.07*</b>	1									
4. Managing position (non-managing = ref. cat)	.2	NA	-.01	<b>.08*</b>	.07	1								
5. Work Powerlessness	3.5	1.2	-.02	<b>.13**</b>	<b>.08*</b>	<b>-.16**</b>	1							
6. Work Meaninglessness	2.7	.9	.00	<b>.15**</b>	-.02	<b>-.12**</b>	<b>.42**</b>	1						
7. Policy Powerlessness	5.6	1.2	-.07	<b>-.16**</b>	.00	<b>-.15**</b>	<u>.06</u>	<u>-.03</u>	1					
8. Policy Meaninglessness	4.6	1.0	.01	-.03	.02	-.05	<u>.01</u>	<u>.09*</u>	<b>.23**</b>	1				
9. Work effort	8.1	1.0	.01	.00	.05	<b>.23**</b>	<b>-.26**</b>	<b>-.34**</b>	<b>-.10**</b>	<b>-.12**</b>	1			
10. Intention to leave	2.8	1.9	-.03	.02	.07	-.02	<b>.21**</b>	<b>.24**</b>	.01	.04	<b>-.15**</b>	1		
11. Willingness to implement policy	6.2	1.6	-.02	<b>.16**</b>	.03	.01	.03	-.01	<b>-.23**</b>	<b>-.30**</b>	<b>.18**</b>	-.06	1	
11. Behavioral support for the policy	73.1	15.8	-.05	<b>.13**</b>	.01	.05	-.01	-.03	<b>-.21**</b>	<b>-.40**</b>	<b>.21**</b>	<b>-.13**</b>	<b>.36**</b>	1.0

Note. \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01. The means for variables 5 to 11 are adjusted to an equivalent ten-point scale to ease interpretation.

Before we will analyze the results of the descriptive statistics, we must consider the possibility of common method bias, that is, variance that is due to the measurement method rather than the constructs themselves (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Self-reported data based on a single application of a questionnaire can result in inflated relationships between variables due to this common method variance. 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. The factors together accounted for 75% of the total variance (using the 'eigenvalue > 1' criterion). The most significant factor did not account for a majority of the variance (only 12%). 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.

Hypothesis 1 states that work alienation and policy alienation are distinct concepts, which can be related, but only to a limited degree. As can be seen from Table 4.1 (underlined scores), the dimensions of work and policy alienation are only moderately related. There is one significant correlation, between work and policy meaninglessness, but this correlation is only moderate ( $r=.09$ ). Furthermore, using factor analyses, we saw that the policy and work alienation concepts were rather different (they loaded onto different factors). Hence, we can conclude that work alienation and policy alienation are clearly distinct concepts. In the next section, we will analyze whether the effects of work and policy alienation are also distinct.

## 4.2 The effects of work alienation and policy alienation

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine hypotheses 2, 3 4 and 5, see Table 4.2. Hypothesis 2 notes that the dimensions of work alienation have a higher influence on work effort (work level) than the dimensions of policy alienation. The regression results show that this is indeed the case. Work powerlessness and work meaninglessness both have a significant negative influence on the amount of effort employees put in their work ( $\beta=-.12$ ,  $p<.01$ ;  $\beta=-.27$   $p<.01$  respectively). On the other hand, the policy alienation dimensions were far less influential here ( $\beta=-.05$ ,  $p=n.s.$ ;  $\beta=-.07$   $p<.05$  respectively). This means that, when employees feel limited in their influence over their work or find their work meaninglessness, they will put less effort in their work.

Hypothesis 3 argues that the dimensions of work alienation have a higher influence on intention to leave (work level) than the dimensions of policy alienation. Our empirical data indeed shows that this is the case. When midwives feel alienated from their work, they are more inclined to look for another job ( $\beta=-.14$ ,  $p<.01$  for work powerlessness;  $\beta=-.19$   $p<.01$  work meaninglessness). On the other hand, the policy alienation dimensions were not significant in explaining intention to leave.

The fourth and fifth hypothesis examine the effects of work and policy alienation on a policy level. In hypothesis 4, we expected that the policy alienation dimensions had a higher influence on the willingness to implement a policy than the work alienation dimensions. This proved to be the case in the policy we examined. The more policy alienation the midwives experienced, the less they were willing to implement the policy ( $\beta=-.16$ ,  $p<.01$ ;  $\beta=-.26$   $p<.01$  respectively). As anticipated, the work

alienation dimensions were far less relevant. Indeed, they even proved to be insignificant for explaining the willingness to implement public policies.

Lastly, hypothesis 5 was formulated as follows: 'The dimensions of policy alienation have a higher influence on behavioral support for the policy than the dimensions of work alienation'. As can be seen in the Table below, our empirical data support this hypothesis. The policy alienation dimensions have a strong influence on the behavioral support for the 20 weeks echo ( $\beta=-.11$ ,  $p<.01$ ;  $\beta=-.37$   $p<.01$  respectively). This is especially the case for the dimension policy meaninglessness. On the other hand, the degree of work alienation did not significantly influence the behavioral support for the policy.

**Table 4.2 Regression analyses for effects of work and policy alienation dimensions**

	<u>Work level</u>		<u>Work level</u>		<u>Policy level</u>		<u>Policy level</u>	
	Effects on work effort		Effects on intention to leave		Effects on willingness to implement policy		Effects on behavioral support for the policy	
	B	β	B	β	B	β	B	β
Constant	9.23	NA	.36	NA	8.26	NA	104.90	NA
<b><u>Control variables</u></b>								
Female (male=ref.cat)	.05	.01	-.35	-.03	-.14	-.01	-4.22	-.04
Age	.00	.03	-.01	-.04	.02	.12**	.15	.10
Education	.08	.04	.25	.06	.10	.03	.28	.01
Managing position (non-managing = ref. cat)	.41	.16**	.12	.02	-.15	-.04	.11	.00
<b><u>Work alienation dimensions</u></b>								
Powerlessness	-.10	<b>-.12**</b>	.22	<b>.14**</b>	.04	<b>.03</b>	-.25	<b>-.02</b>
Meaninglessness	-.29	<b>-.27**</b>	.38	<b>.19**</b>	-.05	<b>-.03</b>	-.04	<b>.00</b>
<b><u>Policy alienation dimensions</u></b>								
Powerlessness	-.04	<b>-.05</b>	.00	<b>.00</b>	-.21	<b>-.16**</b>	-1.42	<b>-.11**</b>
Meaninglessness	-.07	<b>-.07*</b>	.04	<b>.02</b>	-.42	<b>-.26**</b>	-5.65	<b>-.37**</b>
Overall R <sup>2</sup>		.18		.08		.13		.19
Overall F		17.69**		7.00**		12.39**		19.07**
<b><u>The following criteria are met for all three regression analyses (see also Field, 2005):</u></b>								
Criterion of independent residuals (Durbin-Watson 2.0/1.9/1.9/1.8. 1<criterion<3). Criterion of no multicollinearity (no VIF values above 10 and average close to 1. for all regressions). No exclusion of influential outlying cases was required (using casewise diagnostics: 3.2%/3.8%/3.4/3.7% above standardized residual > 2 . Cook's distance max. .09/.08/.06/.2 (criterion < 1). Criteria of homoscedasticity and normality met.								

Note: \* p < .05 \*\* p < .01.

## 5 Conclusions and discussion

We started this paper with the assertion that the alienation of employees has been intriguing scholars and practitioners for a long time. One important concept here is the notion of (subjective) work alienation, which can be considered as a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from work. Based on work alienation and public administration literature, a new concept has been developed: policy alienation, defined as a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the policy being implemented by a professional who, on a regular basis, interacts directly with clients. In this paper, our main goal was to study the relationships and effects of work and policy alienation. In this way, we could (a) show whether work alienation and policy alienation were empirically distinct concepts, in order to provide further evidence of the construct validity of policy alienation and (b) underscore (or nuance) the usefulness of these concepts, given their effects on important indicators on the work and policy level.

Based on literature from the sociology of work and organization, public administration, change management and HRM, a number of hypotheses were constructed for examining the relationships between, and effects of, work and policy alienation. These hypotheses were tested in a survey of 790 Dutch midwives. We showed that work alienation and policy alienation were clearly distinct concepts. First, the dimensions of work and policy alienation were only lowly correlated. Furthermore, work alienation and policy alienation had very different effects. The work alienation dimensions were highly influential on important work level indicators, such as work effort and intention to leave. On the other hand, the policy alienation dimensions influenced indicators on the policy level (willingness to implement and behavioral support for the change). This corresponds with the statement of Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), who note that variables relate most strongly to one another when they are on the same level of specificity.

Hence, our first conclusion is that work and policy alienation are clearly distinct concepts. This has implications for both practitioners and scholars. For practitioners, it means that we falsified the statement that resistance against policies is explained by the degree of work alienation of employees (Peters & Pouw, 2005). Practitioners, such as policy makers or managers, can take this into account and for instance try to positively influence the willingness to implement a new policy by executing interventions aimed at increasing the perceived influence of professionals on a policy level (decreasing policy powerlessness), rather than stating that it is impossible to gain acceptance for a policy. For scholars, it provides further evidence for the construct validity of the policy alienation framework. The policy alienation concept proves helpful for examining the experiences of employees with new policies. By properly distinguishing between work alienation and policy alienation, scholars can increase their understanding of different aspects of work life of professionals. In a similar way, Meyer and Herscovitch make a distinction between different levels and types of commitment (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). In a subsequent study (2002), they showed how commitment to a change and commitment to an organization are clearly different concepts, and that this has important implications for research and practice.

Our second conclusion is that policy alienation and work alienation are both useful concepts, especially given their strong effects on important indicators on the work and job level. When

professionals feel alienated from their *work*, this negatively influences the effort they put in their work and heightens their intention to leave their job. When professionals feel alienated from a *policy*, this negatively influences their willingness to implement a policy and their behavioral support for the change. Given the outcomes of this study, we therefore feel that the concept of alienation should remain an important concept in organization studies. While alienation was a widely studied topic until the end of the 1980s, it seems to attract far less attention nowadays. McKinlay and Marceau (2011) reiterate the importance of using the alienation framework. They analyzed the discontent of physicians, in a recent study titled “New wine in an old bottle: does alienation provide an explanation of the origins of physician discontent?”. They conclude that:

“The classic concept of alienation may build upon valuable earlier work and provide a new, coherent explanation of the workplace origins of physician discontent. Alienation theory combines both structural and psychological components associated with workplace discontent and has the potential to explain the changing position of knowledge workers (such as physicians) in the new economy.”

We can agree with such a statement. Apart from highlighting the usefulness of the alienation concept, we also urge scholars to conceptualize and measure different types of alienation, specified for the specific research problems assessed. Hence, scholars could study policy alienation, but also alienation from their managers (manager alienation) or from administrative rules and regulations (alienation from red tape) (cf. Pandey & Scott, 2002).

In our final conclusion, we want to highlight the importance of work and policy *meaninglessness*. In this study, we examined the dimensions powerlessness and meaninglessness. In the results section, we showed that, for every effect, the meaninglessness dimensions were more important than the powerlessness dimensions. For instance, when a professional experiences that his work becomes more meaningless, this will have a far greater effect on his work than when he or she experiences more powerlessness (given that their standard deviations are approximately equal, which is the case). Many studies in HRM, organization studies and change management look at the degree of powerlessness, or influence, in general decision making or during organizational changes (Bouma, 2009; Jackson, 1983; Judson, 1991). For instance, Judson (1991) argues that participation is the most powerful lever to gain acceptance for a change. However, given the results of this study, we urge practitioners and scholars to centre their attention on the perceived meaninglessness of work or a policy, rather than focus on powerlessness aspects. For instance, managers could think about ways to improve the perceived added value of the work professionals do. One way could be to more intensively communicate the results achieved by the work of the professionals. The issue of Public Service Motivation (PSM) (Perry, 1996) is related to this, as Brewer and Selden (1998:417) describe PSM as “the motivational force that induces individuals to perform meaningful public service”.

As all studies, this study has a number of limitations. One important limitation is that we only analyzed one group of public professionals, that is, Dutch midwives. The results of this study, and the implications outlined, should be interpreted in light of this limited context and sample. An area for further research would be to test the proposed model using other types of policies in a range of public domains. Here, a comparative approach might work adequately, examining different kinds of policies in various countries.

A second limitation concerns the chosen method. In this study, we used quantitative analyses to examine the degree of work and policy alienation, and its effects. A qualitative approach could also be applied here, to increase the understanding of the context in which these public professionals work. This can be very beneficial when examining sociological/psychological phenomena such as subjective alienation. Hence, a sequential strategy can be used, where we started with a quantitative approach, which is followed by a qualitative approach to further understand and contextualize the feelings and perceptions of the professionals (see also Holloway & Wheeler, 2009:19).

In sum, this study shows that work and policy alienation are clearly distinct concepts, and that they can be very useful for analyzing the experiences of professionals with their work or the policy they have to implement. Embracing and further researching alienation, including ways to *reduce* it, should prove to be a timely and productive endeavor for both researchers and practitioners alike.

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## Appendix

In this appendix, we will show all scales used in the study. Five point Likert scales for all items were used, unless stated otherwise.

### Scales on a work level

*Work alienation – Powerlessness (Mottaz, 1981)*

1. I have a good deal of freedom in the performance of my daily task (R)
2. I have the opportunity to exercise my own judgement on the job (R)
3. I have little control over how I carry out my daily tasks
4. I make most work decisions without first consulting my supervisor (R)
5. I am not able to make changes regarding my job activities
6. My daily tasks are largely determined by others
7. I make my own decisions in the performance of my work role (R)

*Work alienation – Meaninglessness (Mottaz, 1981)*

1. My work is a significant contribution to the successful operation of the organization (R)
2. Sometimes I am not sure I completely understand the purpose of what I am doing
3. My work is really important and worthwhile (R)
4. I often wonder what the importance of my job really is
5. I often feel that my work counts for very little around here
6. I understand how my work role fits into the overall operation of this organization (R)
7. I understand how my work fits with the work of others here (R)

*Intention to leave (Bozeman & Perrewé, 2001)*

1. I will probably look for a new job in the near future
2. At the present time, I am activily searching for another job in a different organization
3. I do not intend to quit my job (R)
4. It is unlikely that I will look for a different organization to work for in the next year (R)
5. I am not thinking about quitting my job at the present time

*Work effort (Gould-Williams, 2004)*

1. I help new workers, even when not required to do so
2. I stay late if necessary to help out
3. I make suggestions for improvements
4. I volunteer for things that are not part of the job
5. I avoid extra duties and responsibilities (R)
6. I always work particularly hard
7. I seek out training and other ways of improving my performance at work
8. I work hard because I want to

### **Scales on a policy level**

When looking at the scales on a policy level, we see that for numerous scales, words are underlined. These are the 'templates'. Templates allow researchers to adapt items to their specific situation by replacing general phrases with more specific ones: ones that fit the context of their research. For example, instead of using the terms 'the policy', 'organization' and 'professionals', the researcher can rephrase these items to suit the specific situation, for example replacing them with 'the DRG-policy', 'institution' and 'mental healthcare professionals'. As an example, one of the template items for tactical powerlessness was:

In my organization, professionals could take part in conversations regarding the execution of the policy

In our example this becomes:

In my institution, mental healthcare professionals could take part in conversations regarding the execution of the DRG-policy

In the table below, we have shown the terms in the standard template can be used, as well as how it is used in this study.

**Table - Terms and templates when using scale items**

Term in standard template	Term used in policy 20-weeks echo
Policy/change	SER (Structural Echosound Research)
Professionals	Healthcare professionals
Organization	Organization
Clients	Clients (child and parents)
Policy goal	Three goals were identified. Increasing: - Insights in possible defects of the child - Insights in referral opportunities for treatment - Insights in possibility for abortion until 24 weeks
Ministry	Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport

*Policy alienation - Strategic powerlessness (Tummers, forthcoming 2012)*

1. In my opinion, professionals had too little power to influence the policy
2. We professionals were completely powerless during the introduction of the policy
3. Professionals could not at all influence the development of the policy at the national level (Minister and Ministry of X, National Government)
4. On a national level, professionals could influence how the policy was set up (R)
5. Professionals, by means of their professional associations, actively helped to think with the design of the policy (R)
6. Politicians did – during the design of the policy - not listen to the professionals at all

*Policy alienation – Tactical powerlessness (Tummers, forthcoming 2012)*

1. In my organization, especially professionals could decide how the policy was being implemented (R)
2. In my organization, professionals have - by means of working groups or meetings - taken part in decisions on the execution of the policy (R)
3. The management of my organization should have involved the professionals far more in the execution of the policy
4. Professionals were not listened to over the introduction of the policy in my organization
5. In my organization, professionals could take part in conversations regarding the execution of the policy (R)
6. I and my fellow professionals were completely powerless in the introduction of the policy in my organization

*Policy alienation – Operational powerlessness (Tummers, forthcoming 2012)*

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

*Policy alienation – Societal meaninglessness (Tummers, forthcoming 2012)*

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

*Policy alienation – Client meaninglessness (Tummers, forthcoming 2012)*

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

*Willingness to change (Metselaar, 1997)*

1. I intend to try to convince employees of the benefits the change will bring
2. I intend to put effort into achieving the goals of the change
3. I intend to reduce resistance among employees regarding the change
4. I intend to make time to implement the change
5. I intend to put effort in order to implement the change successfully

*Behavioral support for a change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002)*

Behavioral support for a change is a 101-point continuum constructed to reflect a range of resistance and support behavior.

What is your behavior regarding the change. Please indicate the number of points:

- Championing (81-100 points)

I demonstrate extreme enthusiasm for the change by going above and beyond what is formally required to ensure the success of the change and promoting the *change* to others

- Cooperation (61-80 points)

I demonstrate support for the change by exerting effort, going along with the spirit of the change, and being prepared to make modest sacrifices

- Compliance (31-60 points)

I demonstrate minimum support for the change by going along with the change, but doing so reluctantly

- Passive resistance (21-40 points)

I demonstrate opposition in response to the change by engaging in covert or subtle behaviors aimed at preventing the success of the change

- Active resistance (0-20 points)

I engage in overt behaviors that are intended to ensure that the change fails

Number of points: ...