

Bringing history in:
Policy accumulation and general policy alienation

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Abstract

Research mainly looked at problems public professionals have with specific policy programs. However, policies are not developed in a vacuum. Public professionals are often confronted with (a series of) policy changes, intended to refine, replace or complement other policies. This policy accumulation results in professionals having a certain predisposition towards policies in general. To conceptualize this predisposition, we introduce the term general policy alienation. We investigate whether the earlier developed policy alienation scale can be adapted to measure general policy alienation. Our analyses show that the scale performs satisfactory. Theoretical relevance, as well as directions for practical applications are discussed.

Keywords

General policy alienation, measurement scale, policy accumulation, public professionals

INTRODUCTION

‘This strike is about much more than the compulsory seven and a half hours teachers should spend daily at school [according to a new controversial government proposal]’ (President of the Norwegian Teachers Union, Education International 2014). This quote illustrates that public professionals who regularly work on the frontline of public administration (such as schoolteachers), where they interact directly with citizens, are confronted with government policies that they do not always support. Moreover, they have an important role in the success of these policies given their discretion during implementation (Gofen 2014; Hupe and Hill 2007; Lipsky 1980; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003). As such, their support influences the effectiveness and legitimacy of government policies (Bekkers et al. 2007; Freidson 2001).

Surprisingly, the experiences of public professionals with new policies are often studied in isolation (e.g. Handley and Howell-Moroney 2010; Sager et al. 2014), ignoring the fact that these policies are not developed in a vacuum (Hogwood and Peters 1982). Very often, these experiences have a history because they build upon earlier experiences with other related policies. This process can be described as policy accumulation (In ’t Veld 1989): the continuous aggregation of policies that follow each other. What this accumulation notion suggests is that public professionals have a certain predisposition, with varying degrees of positivity, towards policies in general. Insights from change management studies - where terms such as 'change fatigue' and 'change cynicism' are used - show that employees' previous experiences of change affect their openness and willingness to change at a later stage (Bordia et al. 2011). The same mechanism may also apply to public professionals and their receptivity of new policies, and this will also influence the effectiveness and legitimacy of these policies. If we want to increase our understanding of the influence of this policy predisposition, we first have to conceptualize it and, second, have to operationalize and measure it.

Tummers, Bekkers, and Steijn (2009) proposed a policy alienation framework to systematically analyse whether public actors identify with a specific policy. However, the framework does not take the accumulation of previous experiences into account. Here, we introduce the term

general policy alienation based on distinctions made in the literature between general and specific trust (Kenning 2008) and self-efficacy (Schwoerer et al. 2005). To demonstrate that this is a phenomenon that professionals genuinely experience, we return to the quote that introduced this article: ‘This strike is about much more than the compulsory seven and a half hours...’. This strike by Norwegian secondary school teachers *did* start as a reaction to the introduction of a new controversial government proposal, but the strike was about more than that. Months before the strike started, the Norwegian teachers had already voted against another government proposal because they perceived it as a threat to their professional autonomy and their ability to deliver high quality education. The later attitude of these Norwegian teachers was therefore in line with our conceptualization of general policy alienation as a state of mind reflecting accumulated past policy experiences. Alongside conceptualizing general policy alienation, we also investigate whether an adapted version of the previous policy alienation scale (Tummers 2012) can be used to assess professionals’ general perceptions of government policy, thereby helping in the analysis of the effect of professionals’ past policy experiences. By taking history into account, this would contribute to a more realistic and context-sensitive approach when studying policy implementation.

This article is structured as follows. In the first part, we discuss the existing theory on policy accumulation and policy alienation. The second part presents the empirical component of this study based on data from a survey among 1,096 Dutch secondary school teachers. Here we report the steps taken in the development of a reliable and valid measurement scale, including exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, and internal and convergent validity tests. After discussing the results, we conclude by evaluating our contribution to the policy implementation literature. Finally, we discuss how our results can benefit public administration scholars and practitioners in their continuous quest to improve public service delivery.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Policy accumulation

When studying policies, history matters (Pierson 2000). A policy's past should therefore not be ignored. Hogwood and Peters (1982) noted that scholars often speak of creation, birth, and innovation as though policies come new into the world. In reality, they argued, new policies are rarely written on a clean slate, but rather on a well-occupied or even crowded tablet of existing laws, organizations, and clients. Policies fit within a certain tradition of policies and policy changes. Attention has also been paid to this notion of history in studies of institutional change. Here, Thelen (2004) introduced the concept of institutional layering to explain transformation as a process in which new elements are attached to existing institutions, thereby gradually changing their status and structure. The institution is not replaced, but new layers, such as policies, policy processes, actors, or rules, are added to it. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011: 8) commented that 'the detail of public sector reforms turns out to be more like geological sedimentation, where new layers overlie but do not replace or completely wash away the previous layer'. The introduction of a new policy is thus shaped by interactions with the pre-existing policies it is intended to either specify, replace, or complement as it adapts to unanticipated implementation circumstances and evolving political needs (Van Gunsteren 1976; Wildavsky 1979). The term 'policy accumulation' is used to refer to these processes (In 't Veld 1989). Due to this accumulation process, public professionals will have a certain predisposition towards policies in general, and this will affect their receptivity towards new policies.

General policy alienation

Tummers, Bekkers, and Steijn (2009) conceptualized policy alienation in order to systematically and coherently analyse why public professionals do, or do not, identify with government policies. Policy alienation is defined as 'a cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the policy program being implemented by a public professional who regularly interacts directly with clients' (Tummers, Bekkers, and Steijn 2009: 688). They distinguished two main dimensions of policy alienation: policy

powerlessness and policy meaningfulness. In this article, we make a conceptual distinction between public professionals' specific policy alienation (disconnection from a specific policy program) and general policy alienation (an overall disconnect from government policies).

We first need to define the terms 'profession' and 'public professionals'. However, distinguishing professions from non-professions has proven difficult. Several authors have argued that professionals must have specific knowledge and do certain things to be professional (content), and they must be part of a professional association (control) to acquire content and be regarded as professionals with special privileges (Abbott 1988; Elliot 1972; Freidson 2011). Others, such as Etzioni (1969), proposed a distinction between professions and semi-professions. The latter referring to professions with limited autonomy and decision-making responsibility. In light of our research topic, we use a fairly broad definition of professions offered by Gabe, Bury, and Elston (2004: 163): 'to describe an occupation as a profession may be simply to identify it as a particular kind of occupation, typically one with high status and high rewards, requiring long formal training and delivering a personal service'. In line with this, a semi-profession is then an occupation without high status and high rewards. We subsequently define public professionals as employees working in professions (such as medical doctors) and semi-professions (such as teachers or social workers) in the public sector. With this definition, we want to emphasize that our research is relevant for understanding both professionals' and semi-professionals' experiences with national policies. For our study, two distinguishing characteristics of frontline public professionals are relevant. The first is that these public professionals are responsible for implementing and thereby defending the policies of the government (Hupe and Hill 2007; Lipsky 1980; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003). The second is that, in doing this, they have a certain degree of autonomy in their regular interactions with citizens (Brodkin 2011; Sandfort 2000).

In the realm of policy formulation and implementation, policy powerlessness relates to the degree of influence public professionals have (or rather lack) over shaping a policy program. This power may be exercised on the strategic, tactical, or operational levels (Tummers, Bekkers, and Steijn 2009) where it influences, respectively, the national level, the organizational level, and the actual policy implementation. The second dimension of policy alienation is meaningfulness. In the context

of policymaking and implementation, meaninglessness refers to professionals' perceptions of the contribution a policy makes (or fails to make) to some greater purpose. Societal meaninglessness refers to the perception of professionals concerning the value that policies add to socially relevant goals (Tummers, Bekkers, and Steijn 2009). For instance, professionals may perceive a policy program as not actually providing desirable public services or outcomes, such as improved educational quality. Client meaninglessness reflects professionals' perception of the value added for their own clients. If professionals perceive they are not helping their clients by implementing certain policies, this amounts to a high level of client meaninglessness. The latter should logically be most pertinent to public servants such as schoolteachers who have direct working relationships with citizens (as clients) and we use the term 'frontline' to refer to those in such a relationship.

The policy alienation framework has primarily been used to analyse professionals' and semi-professionals' experiences with single policies. In this study, however, we focus on general policy alienation. Do professionals have the impression that they can, in general, influence the shaping of government policies? Further, do they have the impression that government policies are, in general, meaningful and add value for society as a whole and for their own clients? As with specific policy alienation, general policy alienation can be conceptualized using five dimensions. We conclude this section by summarizing and defining these dimensions in Table 1. This table also shows, for each dimension, the definition of specific policy alienation in order to clarify the distinction between the two concepts. Further, an example is provided of each dimension as it relates to general policy alienation.

Table 1: Definition of general policy alienation: Five dimensions

Dimension	Policy alienation*	Definition	
		General policy alienation	Example high general policy alienation
Strategic powerlessness	The perceived influence of professionals on decisions concerning the content of policy X as captured in rules and regulations.	The influence that professionals usually perceive themselves as having on decisions concerning the content of government policies as captured in rules and regulations.	A teacher feeling that the government drafts education policies without involving teachers.
Tactical powerlessness	Professionals' perceived influence on decisions concerning the way policy X is implemented within their organization.	The influence that professionals usually perceive themselves as having on decisions concerning the way (new) government policies are implemented within their organization.	A teacher stating that the school leader does not involve teachers structurally in designing the implementation of government policies within the school.
Operational powerlessness	The perceived influence of professionals during actual implementation of policy X.	The influence that professionals usually perceive themselves as having during the actual implementation of government policies.	A teacher answering 'totally agree' to a survey question asking if autonomy during the implementation of government policies is usually lower than it should be.
Societal meaninglessness	The perception of professionals concerning the added value of policy X to policy goal Y.	The perception of professionals concerning the added value of contemporary policy to socially relevant goals.	A teacher stating in an interview that contemporary education policy is, in their opinion, not contributing to socially relevant goal A.
Client meaninglessness	Professionals' perceptions of the added value of policy X for their own clients.	The perception of professionals concerning the added value of contemporary policy for their own clients.	A teacher noting that, overall, contemporary education policy has detrimental effects on their own students' wellbeing.

* The definitions presented in this column are drawn from Tummers (2012)

Here, we should emphasize that we are not claiming that the way professionals respond to new policies is dependent only on their alienation towards a specific policy or their general policy alienation: other factors are also relevant. These include the influence of professional culture and organizational socialization (Hatmaker, Park, and Rethemeyer 2011; Oberfield 2010). Furthermore, personality characteristics can play a role, such as psychological reactance and self-efficacy (Bandura

1977; Brehm and Brehm 2013). This is fully acknowledged, and will be discussed more extensively in the concluding section. However, since the main goal of our article is to capture, using the new concept of ‘general policy alienation’, how past policy events influence later responses of professionals, we do not focus explicitly on such aspects.

GENERAL POLICY ALIENATION MEASUREMENT SCALE

In this section, we report on how we developed an empirically validated measurement scale for general policy alienation. We first briefly introduce the case in which we tested our scale, and then show how we developed the items and collected our sample. We then describe our analysis plan and present the results of the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, plus internal construct and convergent validity tests.

Case

The case we selected for our study is the Dutch secondary education sector. Within this sector, there are around 700, both publicly run and privately run, schools. We selected this case because, in recent decades, the sector has experienced many problems as a result of the reshuffling of authority and responsibilities between the ministerial and the school levels (Pijl and Frissen 2009). Further, the sector has been characterized by numerous policy changes (Bronneman-Helmers 2008). These problems were also highlighted by the 2008 Dutch Parliamentary Commission (‘Commission Dijsselbloem’) that investigated problems with education reforms. The Commission’s main conclusion was that the government interfered too often in education. They recommended that schools should have greater autonomy, rather than, as in the past, being mere executors of central government policies. That the findings of the Commission are still relevant is highlighted by a recent report by the

Dutch Education Council that stated that teachers have not seen any improvement since the Commission Dijsselbloem report (Onderwijsraad 2014).

Item generation and expert review

The proposed general policy alienation measurement scale is an adaptation of the validated policy alienation measurement scale (Tummers 2012). As such, we used the same items (measured on five-point Likert scales), but adjusted them to measure general policy alienation. For instance, in the policy alienation measurement scale the following item is used to measure tactical powerlessness:

In my organization, professionals were not listened to about the introduction of the policy

To measure general policy alienation, this becomes:

In my organization, professionals are not listened to during the introduction of government policies

An example item for the meaningfulness dimension of the policy alienation scale is:

The policy is contributing to the welfare of my clients (R)

To measure general policy alienation, this becomes:

In general, government policies contribute to the welfare of my clients (R)

To further increase content validity (DeVellis 2003), we asked ten experts to evaluate the adjusted items. We selected these experts for their range of different expertise, including public administration scholars, specialists in electronic surveys, policy officers working at the Ministry of Education, and teachers. Appendix I presents an overview of the items in the general policy alienation scale.

Sample and procedure

The general policy alienation measurement scale was tested using large-scale survey data. These data were collected in June 2013. A nationwide sample of 2,863 secondary teachers, selected through the records of the pension fund for all Dutch government and education employees (ABP), was identified. This ensured that the sample would be sufficiently representative of all Dutch secondary school teachers. All the potential respondents were sent an e-mail with an invitation to voluntarily participate in the questionnaire; and a reminder was sent one week later. In total, 1,096 teachers completed the questionnaire: a response rate of 38 percent. The average age of the respondents was 51 years, and 59 percent were male. National statistics on secondary school teachers in 2013 indicate that the average age is 46 and that 48 percent are male (DUO 2014). As such, men are overrepresented in our sample, and the respondents were on average older than the population from which they were drawn.

Analysis

In order to establish whether the general policy alienation measurement scale performed as expected, a number of analyses were completed using the latent variable program Mplus (version 6)¹. All parameters were estimated using full information likelihood estimation (FIML) such that all respondents with data on at least one of the variables were included in the analyses. As a first step, we conducted factor analyses. Factor analysis is a statistical method used to determine the number of underlying dimensions contained in a set of observed variables and to identify the subset of variables that corresponds to each dimension. Since the policy alienation scale had been validated in previous studies, the dimensionality of policy alienation was already known, and so a confirmatory factor analysis was in principle sufficient (Brown 2012). However, since we had made minor modifications to each item and previous survey studies using the scale were conducted in the healthcare sector, an exploratory factor analysis was nevertheless conducted. Here, we randomly split the total sample of 1,096 into two (Subsample 1 $n=543$; Subsample 2 $n=553$). We carried out an exploratory factor

¹ All Mplus output and raw data are available from the first author.

analysis using the first subsample, and a confirmatory factor analysis using the second. Osborne and Fitzpatrick (2012) refer to this as internal replication and recommend this approach for determining the extent to which solutions are likely to be robust. Finally, we conducted tests to establish the construct validity of the general policy alienation scale by comparing the measured construct to other constructs based on hypothesized relationships (DeVellis 2003). Here we looked at convergent validity: the similarity between measures of theoretically related constructs.

Results of factor analyses

Exploratory factor analysis

An exploratory factor analysis was carried out on our first subsample of 543 teachers. We employed oblique rotation since this enabled us to study both the pattern and the structure matrix. This is a common approach when factors are known to be related (Brown 2012). Further, given the hypothesized five dimensions of general policy alienation, we allowed Mplus to vary the number of factors to be found from 1 to 5. In assessing the number of factors that best fitted the survey data, we referred to the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) (see also Schreiber et al. 2006). Generally accepted cutoff criteria for the CFI and TLI indices are $\geq .95$ for a good fit and $\geq .90$ for a moderate fit. Similarly, RMSEA values $\leq .06$ indicate a good fit and $\leq .08$ a moderate one (Brown 2012). SRMR values $\leq .08$ reflect a good fit (Hu and Bentler 1999). Table 2 shows that CFI and TLI increased, and the RMSEA and SRMR decreased, as the number of factors distinguished increased (i.e. the fit improved). As expected, the five-factor structure of general policy alienation best fitted the data. Only when five factors were distinguished, did all the indices achieve at least a moderate fit.

Table 2: Fit indexes exploratory factor analysis

Fit index	Number of factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
CFI	.48	.74	.79	.88	.95
TLI	.44	.69	.73	.83	.92
RMSEA	.15	.11	.10	.08	.06
SRMR	.13	.08	.06	.03	.03

Confirmatory factor analysis

A confirmatory factor analysis was completed using the second subsample of 553 teachers. Again, we assessed the fit of the model based on the CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR values. The fit of the hypothesized five-factor model was again good (with CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR values of .92, .91, .06, and .05 respectively). This is a good indication that no further modifications to the model are necessary to measure general policy alienation.

Descriptive statistics

Table 3 shows the means scores of our respondents on general policy alienation and its sub-dimensions. Examining Table 3, we see that teachers on average experience considerable policy alienation (mean 3.46). They have the impression that, in general, they do not have the power to influence policies (mean 3.34) and neither do they perceive policies as being meaningful for society or for their own clients (means for societal and client meaninglessness 3.49 and 3.67 respectively). Nevertheless, we should also note that the variation in scores between individual teachers is quite large (with mean scores varying between 1 and 5).

Table 3: Means of general policy alienation and its dimensions

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
General policy alienation (1-5)	1.39	5	3.46	.58
<i>Powerlessness (1-3)</i>	1.72	5	3.34	.60
1. Strategic	1.33	5	3.71	.66
2. Tactical	1	5	3.07	.88
3. Operational	1	5	3.22	.75
<i>Meaninglessness (4-5)</i>	1	5	3.58	.75
4. Societal	1	5	3.49	.85
5. Client	1	5	3.67	.78

Results of construct validity tests

Internal construct validity

Given that the three powerlessness and the two meaningfulness dimensions all measure the same underlying latent construct (general policy alienation), the factors should correlate. Table 4 shows the correlations among the powerlessness and meaningfulness dimensions, and indeed the dimensions, as expected, are all positively correlated.

Table 4: Internal construct validity

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Strategic powerlessness	-				
2 Tactical powerlessness	.39*	-			
3 Operational powerlessness	.45*	.56*	-		
4 Societal meaningfulness	.48*	.30*	.42*	-	
5 Client meaningfulness	.49*	.26*	.47*	.77*	-

* $p < .001$

Convergent validity

Our final test examined the relationship between general policy alienation and theoretically related concepts to test the convergent validity of the scale. If our scale truly measures general policy alienation, it should correlate with scales of related concepts. Here, we examined the correlations of general policy alienation with four related concepts: alienation towards a specific policy program; policy consistency; transformational leadership; and professionals' willingness to implement new policies. Below, we describe why we expect a relationship to exist between each of these four concepts and general policy alienation, and whether correlational analyses confirmed the expectations.

Alienation towards a specific policy program. We argued earlier that alienation towards a specific policy (program) is determined by a combination of a professional's degree of general policy alienation and their perceptions of the unique characteristics of this specific policy (in terms of both content and process). If this is true, general policy alienation should positively correlate with policy alienation towards a specific policy program. To assess this relationship, we asked half of our respondents (randomly selected; $n=551$) to assess the societal and client meaningfulness of a specific recent government policy program, namely 'data-driven teaching' (in Dutch: 'opbrengstgericht werken'). This program aims to stimulate teachers to make educational decisions based on data, a

policy apparently dedicated to the achievement of better student results. Indeed, research in Canada and the US shows that data-driven decision-making in teaching contributes to better student results (e.g. Marsh, McCombs, and Martorell 2010). The policy program is thus to an extent evidence-based. However, another characteristic of the policy is that it intervenes at the classroom level by prescribing how teachers should teach and organize their lessons. This touches on the sensitive ‘what-and-how debate’ in the Dutch education sector: that government should focus on *what* should be taught, and schools (school leaders and teachers) on *how* this should be taught. The data-driven teaching policy program is not aligned with this principle. As such, we would expect these specific characteristics to affect the degree of policy alienation teachers feel towards this policy. However, given the purpose of the correlation analyses - to test the correlation of general policy alienation with related concepts (here: policy alienation towards a specific policy program) - we do not focus further on this misalignment. As expected, the correlation between a professional’s general policy alienation and their perceived societal and client meaningfulness of data-driven teaching is positive. This is true for all five dimensions of policy alienation, with the correlation between general and specific policy alienation varying between .26 (general tactical powerlessness and policy-specific client meaningfulness) and .77 (general client meaningfulness and policy-specific client meaningfulness). This suggests that general and specific policy alienations are indeed related, but distinguishable, concepts. This conceptual distinction would be questionable if the correlation was close to unity.

Table 5: Convergent validity

General policy alienation dimensions	Policy alienation specific program: data driven teaching [^]		Policy consistency ^{^^}	Transformational leadership ^{^^}	Willingness to implement new policies ^{^^}
	SM	CM			
1 Strategic powerlessness	.45*	.41*	-.47*	-.23*	-.33*
2 Tactical powerlessness	.31*	.26*	-.15*	-.71*	-.21*
3 Operational powerlessness	.34*	.35*	-.25*	-.42*	-.31*
4 Societal meaningfulness	.70*	.61*	-.48*	-.30*	-.47*
5 Client meaningfulness	.63*	.77*	-.50*	-.28*	-.51*

* $p < .001$; [^] $n = 551$; ^{^^} $n = 1,096$

Policy consistency. The second correlation that we investigated is between general policy alienation and policy consistency, a concept closely related to policy accumulation. Professionals are often confronted with new policies, and with new rules, regulations, and organizations that they bring. It takes some time to identify with a new policy program (e.g. Elmore and McLaughlin 1988) and so being regularly confronted with new policies could be an important cause of general policy alienation. We would expect that the extent to which teachers have the impression that policies are introduced on an ad-hoc basis and are inconsistent - both over time and in relation to other policy measures - to influence whether they feel connected to these policies, as feeling connected is a process that takes effort and time. As Table 5 shows, all five dimensions of general policy alienation are, as consequently expected, negatively related to policy consistency. We see that strategic powerlessness and societal and client meaninglessness are especially correlated with policy consistency (correlations (r) of -.47, -.48 and, -.50 respectively). This suggests that policies that are more consistent, leading to more consistent policy accumulation, result in lower general policy alienation.

Transformational leadership. The third correlation investigated was between general policy alienation and transformational leadership. Here we made use of the concise measure of transformational leadership by Carless, Wearing, and Mann (2000). We have two main arguments for expecting this correlation. First, the organizational change literature shows that organizational leaders play a crucial role in the successful management of change. Transformational leaders are able to provide an inspirational vision of the future and encourage others to understand the rationale behind new policies (DeCelles, Tesluk, and Taxman 2013). The second argument is that transformational leadership is characterized by empowering and inspiring behavior, thereby supporting others to take personal responsibility when facing new challenges (Moynihan, Wright, and Pandey 2012) - such as new policies. As can be seen in Table 5, all five dimensions of general policy alienation are, as expected from these arguments, negatively related to transformational leadership. We see that especially tactical and operational powerlessnesses are negatively correlated with transformational leadership ($r=-.71$ and $r=-.42$ respectively) - which is in line with the findings discussed above.

Willingness to implement new policies. The fourth correlation investigated was between general policy alienation and willingness to implement new government policies (using the five-item

change willingness scale of Metselaar (1997)). The assumption is that professionals who experience greater general policy alienation will be less willing to implement future policies. We offer two main reasons for this. The first is that, in the change management literature, the 'case for change' notion, which is closely (and negatively) related to the meaningfulness dimension of policy alienation, increases willingness to change. Further, it is well established that influence over decisions related to change – i.e. reduced powerlessness - leads to increased commitment and performance, and less resistance to change (Wanberg and Banas 2000). Furthermore, Tummers (2011) showed that the degree of policy alienation shown by mental healthcare professionals' towards a specific policy (a new reimbursement policy) negatively influenced their willingness to implement that policy. We would expect a similar correlation between general policy alienation and willingness to implement future policies. Indeed, as can be seen in Table 5, all five dimensions of general policy alienation are negatively related to willingness to implement new policies. There are especially strong correlations between both societal and client meaningfulness and the willingness to implement ($r=-.47$ and $r=-.51$ respectively). This suggests that if professionals have the impression that government policies in general contribute to important societal goals and achieve desirable outcomes for their own clients, they will be more willing to implement future government policies - possibly because they expect these future policies to also be meaningful for society and for their clients.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Policies have a history - they are not developed in a vacuum. When studying the effects of specific policies, it is important to take account of the accumulation of policy programs within a specific sector (In 't Veld, 1989). Studying policies in a vacuum, and ignoring the consequences of their history, fails to deliver a complete picture. The starting point of this study was the argument that public professionals' earlier experiences with government policies will affect their current predisposition towards policies in general. This predisposition will, in turn, affect their attitudes and

behaviors towards new policies. Many studies focus on the attitudes and behaviors of public professionals in relation to policy implementation - accepting that appropriate attitudes and behaviors are crucial for successful implementation - but often fail to consider the possible consequences of their policy predisposition. In this study, the focus is on this policy predisposition, and we conceptualize and operationalize it. In this, we build on the earlier work by Tummers, Bekkers, and Steijn (2009, 2012) on policy alienation, defined as a psychological disconnection from a policy program. As we are interested in investigating overall policy experiences, we introduce and operationalize the term general policy alienation, which will enable future research to analyse the overall experiences of professionals and semi-professionals with government policy.

In our study, we theoretically related general policy alienation to the consequences of policy accumulation: the continuous aggregation of policies that historically follow upon each other, and the new rules, regulations, and organizations that result. By studying policy alienation in relation to its historical context, we are not only contributing to the work on policy alienation, we also extend the theoretical work on policy accumulation (In 't Veld 1989) and related concepts such as policy succession (Hogwood and Peters 1982) and institutional layering (Thelen 2004). Our respondents' relatively high scores for general policy alienation show that Dutch secondary school teachers do not in general identify with government policies: they have the impression that they lack sufficient power to influence government policies and they sometimes fail to perceive these policies as meaningful, either for society as a whole or for their own students. Relating this to the concepts of change fatigue and change cynicism, it may be that public professionals experience something akin to policy fatigue or policy cynicism. This is not the same as private sector employees developing cynical attitudes that characterize organizational change efforts as just the 'flavor of the month' (Herold, Fedor, and Caldwell 2007), but about public professionals developing cynical attitudes that characterize new policies as just the 'political flavor of the month'. This is a serious problem, especially for governments, as these public professionals form a crucial link between formulated and implemented policies and between governments and citizens (Bartels 2013, Tummers et al. 2015).

We would urge future studies to dig deeper into this topic. This is important for at least two reasons. First, our analyses found some evidence that public professionals' general policy perceptions

are indeed related to their perceptions of a specific new policy program. That is, the analyses showed that professionals that have a relatively high level of general policy alienation also show greater alienation towards a specific policy program. This suggests that, if one wants to fully understand public professionals' attitudes towards a specific new policy, both their perceptions of this policy's characteristics as well as their overall policy perceptions should be simultaneously investigated (along with other relevant variables as discussed in the next paragraph). Excluding either set of perceptions is likely to result in an inability to put forward satisfactory explanations of why public professionals do, or do not, identify with a specific new policy. Thus, the main advice resulting from this study would be to *bring in policy history*.

Second, the developed and validated measurement scale enables future researchers to quantitatively examine the antecedents and effects of the extent of professionals' general policy alienation (reflecting their policy predisposition). Although we conceptually link professionals' general policy alienation to the consequences of policy accumulation, we are not implying that general policy alienation is the result *only* of accumulated past policy experiences. We acknowledge that other factors play a role, and future research should address this. Regarding new theoretical avenues, we would first urge future research to further analyse the concept of policy accumulation. What policy characteristics influence the degree to which professionals perceive policy accumulation as either positive or negative? Policy accumulation may, for instance, be perceived as negative when the rate of policy change is high (Huy 2001) or the accumulated policies are inconsistent. We have provided some initial evidence of the latter through our correlational analysis between policy consistency and general policy alienation: greater perceived policy consistency - an indicator of more continuous policy accumulation - seems to be related to lower general policy alienation. Second, we recommend further investigation of general and specific policy alienation, and particular responses alongside other important antecedents on the policy, professional, organizational, and individual levels. In this way, one could determine which factors have the greatest influence in specific contexts. As noted, organizational socialization and culture may be important predictors. More generally, potentially important factors can be found in the literature on the sociology of professions (Teodoro

2014), organizational behavior (Vigoda-Gadot and Beerli 2012), and street-level bureaucracy (Hupe and Buffat 2014).

Regarding the possible effects of general policy alienation, our convergent validity tests showed that general policy alienation is negatively related to willingness to implement future policies. This could have important consequences for (the study of) change management in the public sector. Kickert (2010) noted that the change management literature is primarily focused on the private sector and that little attention is paid to the way in which public employees react to change. Our measurement instrument is useful for researching public employees' experiences with past, current, and future policy changes and the consequences of these changes. It will enable future research to fill the gap in the literature on change management by specifically applying a public administration perspective (Kuipers et al. 2014). Ultimately, this could contribute to a better understanding of why, despite all the efforts made, many change efforts in the public sector fail.

Despite the progress made, this study has, as all studies, some limitations. The first limitation is that the data used to establish convergent validity are cross-sectional. In recent years, authors, reviewers, and editors of leading public administration journals have become increasingly concerned about the validity of such research. One of the main concerns is that causal inferences are not possible. In our research, we investigated correlations without aiming to make statements about causality. However, especially in light of the relationship found between policy accumulation, (general) policy alienation, and willingness to implement a specific policy, future studies should adopt longitudinal (or experimental) designs to investigate causality. In this way, it could be established whether professionals' general policy alienation (at $t=0$) influences their feeling of policy alienation towards a newly introduced policy program at some later time ($t=1$), which in turn could influence their general policy alienation (after the implementation of the policy program, at $t=2$). Further, it would also enable an assessment of whether perceptions of policy accumulation processes (at $t=-1$) affect the degree of general policy alienation ($t=0$). A second limitation is that the organizational context was not included in the analyses. Government policies are implemented in this context, and it is therefore likely to have a significant influence on overall policy perceptions. Although we focused on the government context, the convergent validity tests on general policy alienation and

transformational leadership show the importance of organizational leadership and thus organizational context. In future studies, greater attention should therefore be paid to processes at the organizational level.

In concluding, we would emphasize that the present study explicitly considered processes of policy accumulation and promoted the notion that, when investigating the formulation and implementation of a specific (new) policy, this policy's past should not be ignored. Future research should take advantage of this, and use the framework to ensure that attention is given to the previous policy experiences of public professionals. This acknowledges that these professionals bring with them a policy history, and cannot be regarded as 'neutral' implementers. In our opinion, this recognition contributes to a more realistic and context-sensitive research perspective on policy implementation and its effects on public professionals.

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Appendix I: General policy alienation measurement scale

Dimension	General policy alienation item
Strategic powerlessness	1 In my opinion, <u>professionals</u> have too little power to influence government <u>policies</u>
	2 We, as <u>professionals</u> , are completely powerless during the introduction of government <u>policies</u>
	3 <u>Professionals</u> cannot influence the development of policies at the national level (Minister and Ministry of <u>X</u> , National Government)
	4 On a national level, <u>professionals</u> can influence how <u>policies</u> are set up (R)
	5 <u>Professionals</u> , through their professional associations, actively help in drawing up the design of government <u>policies</u> (R)
	6 Politicians, during the design of <u>policies</u> , do not listen to <u>professionals</u> at all
Tactical powerlessness	7 In my <u>organization</u> , it is especially <u>professionals</u> who decide how government <u>policies</u> are implemented (R)
	8 In my <u>organization</u> , <u>professionals</u> - through working groups or meetings - take part in decisions on executing government <u>policies</u> (R)
	9 The management of my <u>organization</u> should involve <u>professionals</u> far more in the execution of government <u>policies</u>
	10 <u>Professionals</u> are not listened to during the introduction of government <u>policies</u> in my <u>organization</u>
	11 In my <u>organization</u> , <u>professionals</u> take part in conversations regarding the execution of government <u>policies</u> (R)
	12 I and my fellow <u>professionals</u> are completely powerless during the introduction of government <u>policies</u> in my <u>organization</u>
Operational powerlessness	13 Generally, I have freedom to decide how to use government <u>policies</u> (R)
	14 Generally, when working with government <u>policies</u> , I can be in keeping with <u>clients</u> ' needs (R)
	15 Generally, working with government <u>policies</u> feels like a harness in which I cannot easily move
	16 Generally, when working with government <u>policies</u> , I have to adhere to tight procedures
	17 Generally, government <u>policies</u> allow me to sufficiently tailor them to the needs of my <u>clients</u>
	18 Generally, government <u>policies</u> allow me to make my own judgments (R)
Societal meaninglessness	19 In general, I think that government <u>policy</u> in the long term will lead to <u>socially relevant goal A</u> (R)
	20 In general, I think that government <u>policy</u> in the short term will lead to <u>socially relevant goal A</u> (R)
	21 In general, I think that government <u>policy</u> has already led to <u>socially relevant goal A</u> (R)
Client meaninglessness	22 Overall, I think that government <u>policy</u> leads to <u>socially relevant goal A</u> (R)
	23 In general, government <u>policy</u> enables me to better solve the problems of my <u>clients</u> (R)
	24 In general, government <u>policy</u> contributes to the welfare of my <u>clients</u> (R)
	25 In general, government <u>policy</u> enables me to help <u>clients</u> more efficiently (R)
	26 Overall, I think government <u>policy</u> is ultimately favorable for my <u>clients</u> (R)

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