POLICY ALIENATION OF PUBLIC PROFESSIONALS: THE EFFECTS

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"As long as education reforms are planned and implemented without consulting the teachers, as long as that happens in a way similar to the communists planning the Soviet grain harvest, that long will the results of these reforms be comparable with the grain harvests in the former Soviet Union."

   Tromp (2003:17)

Abstract

Nowadays, many public professionals face identification problems towards public policies they have to implement; that is, they experience policy alienation. We conceptualize policy alienation, starting from the sociological concept of alienation and showing how this can be used in the realm of policy implementation. Policy alienation occurs when a professional a) perceives he cannot influence the policy b) perceives the policy as meaningless and c) experiences conflicts between different groups (for example clients and management) because of the policy. We explore the effects of policy alienation by applying it to Dutch high school teachers implementing a new policy intended to prepare students better for higher education, in a small case study based on content analysis. We observe that when teachers experience policy alienation, their job satisfaction decreases. Next, the perceived workload of teachers implementing the policy increases when they experience policy alienation. Last, teachers experiencing policy alienation seem to be less effective in implementing the policy.

1   Introduction

In 1998 a new policy was implemented in Dutch high schools, aiming to prepare students better for university by learning them to work independently, acquire practical skills to apply their knowledge and obtain more integrated knowledge. The implementation of this policy, called the Second Phase as it focused on the later years in secondary education, was not without problems, as for example student demonstrations showed. Teachers often did not see the meaning of the reform, making it more difficult for them to identify with it:

> The teachers believe that the implementation of the Second Phase negatively influenced the grades of the students and the way they learn. They are very explicit about the negative influence of the Second Phase on the motivation of the students, their own motivation, the quality of the lessons and the organization of the school.
>
> Parliamentary commission education reform (Commission, 2008:139)

This example illustrates a case where professionals working in the public sector have difficulties identifying with the policy they have to implement. In the Netherlands, for example the WRR (2004) and Van den Brink et al. (2006) state that public professionals experience increasing pressures to focus on effectiveness and efficiency (due to the emphasis on performance management). This often conflicts with professional standards or the demands of the increasingly emancipated clients. Similar observations are made by Pratchett and Wingfield (1996) – who studied the effect of local governmental reform on core beliefs and values of employees – and Hebson, Grimshaw and Marchington (2003) - who studied the relationship between public-private partnerships and the public service ethos. These studies suggest a growing discontent among professional groups.

The policy alienation concept, as we developed elsewhere (Tummers, Bekkers, & Steijn, 2007) introduces the body of literature concerning job alienation, coming from the field of sociology of work and organization, in the public administration discipline. We define policy alienation as the mode of experience in which the public professional, who on a regular basis interacts directly with clients, cannot identify himself with the public policy(s) he has to implement (cf. Lipsky, 1980).

Studying policy alienation of public professionals is not only theoretically interesting (due to links with public policy implementation), but also vital for policy makers. For an appropriate implementation, a minimal level of identification of workers with the relevant policy is required. This will not only influence the effectiveness of a policy program but also influence the quality of interaction between government and citizens, which in the end may influence the legitimacy of government.

How can policy alienation be conceptualized and what consequences does the occurrence of policy alienation have? This is main research question of this paper and is answered by a) a literature review of the concept of policy alienation (section 2) as well as its effects (section 3) and b) an

exploratory case study of Dutch high school teachers implementing the Second Phase (section 4). In the last section some conclusions are formulated.

2 A conceptual model of policy alienation

2.1 From work alienation to policy alienation

The intellectual roots of the alienation concept can be found in the work of Karl Marx (1961 [1844]), who concentrated on *objective work alienation*; the objective distance between the worker and the means of production and the resulting product. The worker is for example alienated when he does not own the means of production. However, contemporary sociological research focuses on *subjective alienation*: alienation as perceived by the worker (Hall, 1994:112).

It is important to discern (subjective) work alienation from (subjective) job alienation. Ramaswami, Agarwal, & Bhargava (1993:191) stated that subjective work alienation is the normative belief about the value of work in a person's life. This is primarily a function of culture or socialization, not of the current job someone is holding. Conversely, subjective job alienation is a concept related to the alienation from the current job a person holds and often a function of factors present in the current job situation. Articles concerning the sociology of work and organization focus primarily on job alienation, although they label it, quite confusingly, work alienation. The main work on job alienation is that of Blauner (1964), who distinguished three dimensions of job alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness and social isolation (as we shall see, the latter can better be understood as 'role conflicts').Our concept of policy alienation has parallels with subjective job alienation, as it is about the identification problems professionals face towards the public policies they are implementing. These identification problems are by definition *perceived* by the worker and are manifested while they operate in their current *job*.

How does alienation fit to the world of policy-making and implementation? Public policies refer to the binding allocation of values for society as a whole in a situation of structural scarcity, due to e.g. the lack of financial but also natural resources (Easton, 1965). As a result tensions and trade offs occur (Stone, 2003). This is especially the case when a policy program is applied in individual cases (Lipsky, 1980), as this is the place where the policy has a direct impact on people's lives. When this implementation is performed by a professional, more tensions occur than in the case of a regular street level bureaucrat, as professionals also have to deal with the tensions coming from the professional association and their professional norms.

Policy alienation as a concept is defined here as the mode of experience in which the public professional, who on a regular basis interacts directly with clients, cannot identify himself with the public policy he has to implement. The degree of policy alienation of a public sector professional is the sum of the scores of this professional on different dimensions of policy alienation. These dimensions are operationalized below, elaborating on the three dimensions of job alienation (Blauner, 1964).

2.2 Policy powerlessness

The first dimension of policy alienation is policy powerlessness: the degree of influence public professionals have on shaping public policy. This influence may be exercised on a strategic, tactical or operational level (cf. Blauner, 1964).

When there is a low degree of possible influence on the *strategic level* of the policy the professionals will likely experience a feeling of powerlessness. This can be the case when, for example, a new policy is drafted without the help of the professionals who have to implement this policy. As a result professionals may become alienated from this policy. It can be expected that the more the professional is able to influence the public policy on a strategic level, the less he will become alienated from this public policy.

The *tactical level* refers to the decisions concerning the way policy goals have to be achieved by the agency itself, which influences the conditions under which the professionals have to perform their tasks. This also refers to the question how these policy goals are transformed into specific performance requirements, which the organization has to accomplish, as well as how resources are allocated among the organization units (e.g. staff, budgets) in order to contribute to these performance goals. In many agencies, performance management systems have been introduced to manage the implementation of public policy programs. However, we notice that these systems may lead to perverse effects, in which the output has become more important than the societal outcomes that have to be realized (Smith, 1995). The more professionals can effectively address these perverse effects at the agency level, the less policy alienation will occur.

Exercising control over the operational working process is another mode of powerlessness. In public administration literature this topic is primarily described in terms of the *discretion* a civil servant has to implement public policies when he interacts directly with clients (*influence at the operational level*). Discretion means that the implementer has a certain degree of freedom in making choices concerning the sort, quantity and quality of sanctions and rewards (Lipsky, 1980). We expect that the more a public professional perceives to have discretion in implementing a public policy, the lower his degree of policy alienation.

2.3   Policy meaninglessness

The second dimension of alienation that Blauner (1964:23) distinguished is *meaninglessness*, the opposite of a feeling of purpose and function. We expect that the higher the degree of meaninglessness caused by a public policy, the higher the degree of policy alienation will be.

Meaninglessness is in the job alienation literature defined as "the inability to comprehend the relationship of one's contribution to a larger purpose" (Sarros, Tanewski, Winter, Santora, & Densten, 2002:304). According to Blauner (1964:23), work is more meaningful when someone a) works on a unique and individuated product; b) works on a larger part of the product; c) is responsible for a larger span of the production process.

Translating this to policy alienation we can again use a distinction between the strategic, the tactical and the operational level. At the *strategic level*, meaninglessness refers to the perception of a professional that a policy program is actually not dealing with specific societal problems nor the provision of desired public goods and services, like delivering financial protection and security. If this is the case, than policy alienation may occur.

At the *tactical level*, meaninglessness is based on the perception of the professional regarding the contribution of the agency to the handling of specific problems or the delivery of public goods. For example, when agencies adopt managerial policies that are more focused on output goals that do not have a clear relationship with societal or outcome goals, the chance that policy alienation may occur, increases.

At the *operational level*, meaninglessness refers to the civil servant's perception of the contribution of his own job or his own activities to deal with concrete and individual cases. For instance, is he really able to help people? If not, then policy alienation might occur.

2.4   Role conflicts

Blauner mentions as the third dimension of alienation *social isolation*. Social isolation can be described as a lack of a sense of belonging in the organization in which someone works, and an inability to identify with this organization. According to Blauner (1964:24) 'membership in an industrial community involves commitment to the work role and loyalty to one or more centers of the work community. Isolation, on the other hand, means that the worker feels no sense of belonging in the work situation and is unable to identify or identifying with the organization.'

Social isolation in relation to the implementation of a specific policy is best to be analyzed by looking at the notion of role conflicts. When implementing a policy, the professional can experience demands coming from different logics, which stress different values and norms and have a legitimacy

of their own (Freidson, 2001). A role conflict arises when these demands are perceived by the public professional as incompatible.

We distinguish four logics (cf. Freidson, 2001). The *institutional* logic implies a number of demands that are derived from the contents of a policy program, for instance laid down in formal rules and regulations, like the policy goals which have to be accomplished. The *provisional* logic formulates a number of (managerial) demands, which guide a proper implementation of the law by the implementation agency or agencies. The *professional* logic expresses a number of demands that should be followed if one wants to be a member of a professional community. A professional is trained by this community and is obliged to follow a number of professional norms, working procedures and working standards. The *demand* logic focuses on the demands and values that a citizen (very often in his role as a client of the government) finds important and which reflect his personal situation.

As stated, these logics can conflict. This happens for instance when a public sector professional perceives that he has to follow the rules (institutional rationality) but by doing this, can not fulfill the needs of the individual client (client rationality). In this way, role conflicts heighten the degree of policy alienation of public professionals.

Before drawing the conceptual framework, attention is paid to possible effects of (the dimensions of) policy alienation.

3   Possible effects of policy alienation

Policy alienation may have several potential effects. We focus here on a two effects which are, according to the literature, very likely to be the result of policy alienation: job satisfaction and policy performance.

3.1   Job satisfaction

We hypothesize that more policy alienation results in less job satisfaction.

In most contemporary literature job satisfaction is defined by focusing on the cognitive process. A widely used definition is that of Price (2001), who defined job satisfaction as 'the affective orientation that an employee has towards his or her work'. Job satisfaction is an affective evaluation of a particular work situation. This is al too often confused with various descriptive dimensions of work (Locke, 1969). Alienation may be viewed as a non-affective description of a particular work situation, along specific dimensions. In the case of policy alienation, these dimensions include the powerlessness to influence a policy, policy meaninglessness and role conflicts. Defined in this way, we can consider job satisfaction as distinct from policy alienation. More specifically, we consider it as a possible effect of policy alienation. It can be an important effect, as research shows that job satisfaction correlates both significantly and positively with job performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001) and organizational performance (Kim, 2005). How does more policy alienation result in lower job satisfaction? A number of reasons can be given by looking at the dimensions of policy alienation.

First, we hypothesize that more perceived policy powerlessness results in less job satisfaction. In a number of studies, the degree of powerlessness (of the job) has a negative influence on job satisfaction. Bush (1984, cited in Johnson, 1989), for example, found that job satisfaction scores were predicted by powerlessness scores. More specifically, more centralization – the degree of influence professionals have in shaping policy - has been linked both theoretically and empirically to lower levels of job satisfaction (DeHart-Davis & Pandey, 2005). Next, the notion of autonomy has frequently been associated with job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Noblet, McWilliams, Teo, & Rodwell, 2006). A number of studies show that higher autonomy leads to a higher degree of job satisfaction (see DeCarlo & Agarwal, 1999). Centralization corresponds with our notions of strategic and tactical powerlessness, while autonomy relates to the degree of operational powerlessness (reversed) the

public sector worker experiences. Therefore, we expect that the higher the degree of policy powerlessness a public professional experiences, the lower his job satisfaction.

It can be hypothesized that the degree of meaninglessness also decreases job satisfaction. The job characteristics theory states as one of the prerequisites for job satisfaction 'experienced meaningfulness of the work itself' (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). This is also confirmed by evidence. Bacharach and Aiken (1979:866) for instance state that 'the more understanding that department heads have of their work in the wider context of the organization, the more satisfied they are'. Translating this to policy meaninglessness, we expect that the less the public professional is able to see the policy as meaningful, or his contribution to this policy as meaningful, the lower his job satisfaction.

A third reason why public professionals experience less job satisfaction is because they experience more role conflicts. Kahn et al. (1964) found that the emotional costs of excessive role conflicts include low job satisfaction, low commitment to the organization, and a high degree of job-related stress. Similarly, Schaubroeck et al. (1989) discovered by researching public professionals that more perceived role conflicts negatively impacts job satisfaction. It is hypothesized that, the more role conflicts the professional experiences because of the implementation of a new policy, the lower his job satisfaction.

In general, we can state the following hypothesis:

H1: The more a public professional experiences policy alienation, the lower his job satisfaction

3.2   Policy performance

We hypothesize that the more a public professional experiences policy alienation, the lower his (individual) policy performance.

Overall policy performance is broadly defined as the extent to which a policy is meeting its stated goals and objectives. Related concepts are policy effectiveness (Cho, Kelleher, Wright, & Yackee, 2005) and policy failure or success (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). We do not use the term policy effectiveness, as we consider effectiveness an element of performance (cf. Brewer, 2005). Next, we do not use terms like policy failure or success, as this proposes an oversimplified failure-success dichotomy (Cho et al., 2005).

When examining the influence of policy alienation on the performance of the policy we are confronted with a problem. Policy alienation is measured on the individual level, while policy effectiveness is measured on a macro level. We cannot plausibly state that, for example when one public sector worker is highly alienated from the policy, the overall policy performance will be lower. We therefore introduce the concept 'individual policy performance': the extent to which the public sector professional is substantially contributing to the policy's stated goals and objectives. The sum of the individual policy performances of course strongly influences overall policy performance (cf. Sabatier, 1986), in a way similar to the influence of job performance on organizational performance (Gelade & Ivery, 2003).

Literature on the influence of policy alienation on (individual) policy performance does not yet exist. For this reason we consider policy commitment of public sector professionals as a proxy for policy alienation. In numerous works on implementation (Hood, 1976; Lipsky, 1980; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984), the commitment of the public service worker implementing the policy is seen as prerequisite for effective implementation. For example, Sabatier (1986) states as one of the necessary conditions for effective implementation of legally stated policy objectives 'committed and skilful implementers who apply themselves to using their discretion so as to realize policy objectives'. Translating this to policy alienation we state that, the more a public professional experiences policy alienation, the lower his policy performance. We now look specifically at the different dimensions of policy alienation, starting with policy powerlessness.

We posit that the degree of strategic or tactical powerlessness negatively influences policy performance. This relationship is mediated by the degree of commitment professionals experience. When people are involved, or participating in decision-making, this positively influences their

commitment to the particular policy. This is known as the 'involvement leads to commitment' principle, which is corroborated by considerable research (Burke, 2008:95). When this involvement is lacking, their commitment will be lower. Translating this to policy alienation, we can state that when professionals are not involved in the making of the policy or the way this policy is implemented in their organization– they are strategically and tactically powerless - they will be less committed to the (new) policy. Commitment is seen as a prerequisite for policy performance. So when a professional perceives to be tactically or strategically powerless, he will be less committed, which can result in a lower (individual) policy performance.

Next, the degree of operational powerlessness can influence the individual policy performance. Lipsky (1980) states that street level bureaucrats (for example teachers) are confronted with a number of often conflicting demands coming from citizens, the organization and the policy. A coping strategy for them is to use their discretion (the operational level of policy powerlessness). This explains the discrepancy between the policy as it is implemented and the official policy. Riccucci (2005:91) comments that: 'discretion at the street-level is one of the primary reasons why the formulated policy is not implemented or delivered as was expected by politicians and higher-level administrators'. But this does not mean that discretion necessarily leads to a lower degree of policy performance. Discretion has a number of positive consequences, for instance the ability to cope with role conflicts, fine-tuning, flexibility, and higher efficiency and effectiveness (Lipsky, 1980). Possible negative consequences are violating the values of legal security and equality before the law, policy drifting, corruption, and incomplete policy implementation. The influence of discretion on policy performance is therefore not unambiguous.

The second dimension of policy alienation focuses on the meaninglessness of the policy the public sector professional experiences. We hypothesize that, when a professional experiences the goals of the policy as meaningless (strategic meaninglessness), he will be less committed to the policy, resulting in a lower policy performance. When professional do not agree with the goals of the policy or experience these goals as irrelevant, they will be less committed to implement the policy. Following Sabatier (1986), this lower commitment will lead to a lower policy performance.

A high degree of tactical meaninglessness is also likely to result in lower policy performance. Tactical meaninglessness refers to the perception of the professional regarding the contribution of the agency to the handling of specific problems or the delivery of public goods. For example, when agencies adopt managerial policies that are more focused on output goals that do not have a clear relationship with societal or outcome goals, there will be a high degree of tactical meaninglessness. This will generally make employees less committed to the policy, which can result in lower policy performance.

At the operational level, meaninglessness refers to the civil servant's perception of the contribution of his own job or his own activities to deal with concrete and individual cases. Here the same applies as with the tactical level of powerlessness. That is, normally a higher degree of operational meaninglessness will result in a lower commitment to the policy and hence lower policy performance.

Looking at the third dimension, role conflicts, we hypothesize that the higher the degree of role conflicts, the lower the policy performance. In the literature the degree of role conflicts has been linked to a lower degree of job effectiveness: 'lack of congruent expectations and demands from other people in the workplace are psychologically uncomfortable and may induce negative emotional reactions, diminish effectiveness and job satisfaction' (Piko, 2006:312). Next, more perceived role conflicts also lower the job performance of employees (Getzels & Guba, 1954). In general we state that the higher the degree of role conflicts the public sector professional experiences, the lower his performance. We research this specifically for the policy level. Translating this general hypothesis to the policy level, we hypothesize that the more role conflicts the professional experiences because of the implementation of a new policy, the lower the policy performance will be.

One remark has to be made here. Lipsky (1980) stated that public sector professionals use their discretion to cope with the often conflicting demands coming from citizens, the organization and the

policy. Discretion should therefore be seen as an interacting variable between the degree of role conflicts and the policy performance of the public sector worker. A high level of discretion could weaken the relationship between role conflicts and policy performance.

In general, we can posit the following hypothesis:

H2: The more a public professional experiences policy alienation, the lower his policy performance

3.3 The relationship between job satisfaction policy performance

Last, we expect that the effects of policy alienation, (individual) policy performance and job satisfaction, are correlated and could influence each other.

As mainstream literature has not yet addressed this specific topic, we examine the related construct job performance and its relationship with job satisfaction to research the job satisfaction-policy performance relationship.

There is a direct relationship between job satisfaction and job performance. According to a meta-analysis of 254 studies, Judge et al. (2001) concluded that the mean true correlation between job satisfaction and job performance estimates 0,30. This is comparable to a meta-analysis of Petty et al. (1984) who reported a mean correlation of 0,31, but significantly higher than the often quoted study of Iaffaldano and Muchinsky (1985), reporting an average correlation of 0,17. Iaffaldano and Muchinsky (1985:217) concluded that job satisfaction and job performance 'are only slightly related to each other'. However, several limitations of this study are apparent (for a detailed discussion, see Judge et al.). When remedied, the average correlation of the meta-analysis of Iaffaldano and Muchinsky is 0,33 (Judge et al., 2001). We can therefore conclude that there is a moderate direct relationship between job satisfaction and job performance.

But the causal linkage between these two constructs is not clear. Normally, it is assumed that job satisfaction influences job performance. This is probably the oldest specification of the relationship and is often attributed to the human relationships movement. As Strauss (1968) commented 'Early human relationists viewed the morale-productivity relationship quite simply: higher morale would lead to improved productivity'. But, surprisingly, as Judge et al. (2001:378) notes 'few studies have posited a unidirectional effect of job satisfaction on job performance, and the findings of those studies are inconclusive'.

A second model assumes that performance *leads* to satisfaction, following the assumption that performance leads to valued outcomes that are satisfying to individuals. This is often based on expectancy theories, who argue that performance would lead to job satisfaction through the provision of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. But similar to the satisfaction → performance relationship, results of studies testing the job performance → job satisfaction relationship are inconsistent.

A third model sees the relationship as reciprocal. There is no distinct theoretical foundation for this type of models. Rather, they are hybrid models of the previous two approaches, assuming that performance can be both satisfying and, in turn, caused by satisfaction. But also for this model, the results of the studies are somewhat mixed Judge et al (Judge et al., 2001:379).

A fourth possibility is that the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance is spurious. A spurious relationship is observed when the relationship between two variables is due to the relation of these two variables to a third, unmeasured variable. Brown and Peterson (1993), for example, found that a significant relationship between job satisfaction and job performance became nonsignificant when role ambiguity was allowed to influence both.

A last possibility is that moderator or mediator variables are present in the relationship (Locke, 1970). A mediating variable is a variable that explains or accounts for the relation between an independent variable and a dependent variable, whereas a moderating variable is one that influences the direction between the independent variable and the dependent variable. A possible mediator variable of the job performance → job satisfaction relationship is that of success. Performance is satisfying because it brings success in the form of valued rewards. Success and achievement are primary causes of life satisfaction, and so should they be of job satisfaction. A possible moderator

variable on the job satisfaction → job performance relationship is autonomy, which is related to operational powerlessness. As jobs with a high degree of autonomy provide greater opportunity for attitudes and motives to affect behavior, the satisfaction - performance relationship should be stronger in high-autonomy jobs (Judge et al., 2001:391).

Looking at the literature on the job satisfaction – job performance relationship, we can conclude that there exists a moderate direct correlation between these constructs, but that the causal linkages are unclear. It is plausible that several causal linkages are working at the same time (Judge et al., 2001).

We use this information for examining the relationship between policy performance and job satisfaction. Policy performance can be seen as a facet of overall job performance. Job performance consists of task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors. Task performance is the performance of the employee with executing certain job tasks. The performance of the implementation of a specific policy is one of such tasks.

We expect that the relationship between job satisfaction and policy performance is weaker than the job satisfaction – job performance relationship. As noted by Fishbein (1979) in order for attitudes to predict behaviors properly, the attitudes and behaviors should be congruent in their generality or specificity. So when job satisfaction is related to job performance, we should examine overall job satisfaction with overall job performance. When examining only a facet of job satisfaction and its relationship on performance, there is no such congruency. The same applies for the job satisfaction – policy performance relationship. To achieve construct correspondence we should examine the relationship between policy satisfaction and policy performance, or the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance. A result of this misfit could yield to lower correlations. In our exploratory qualitative study, however, we explicitly want to explore the effects of policy alienation on job satisfaction and the influence of policy alienation on policy performance. Policy satisfaction is not researched as we expect a very high correlation between policy alienation and policy satisfaction. Next, we do not quantifiably measure the constructs. In sum, we expect that there is a relationship between job satisfaction and policy performance, but that this relationship will not be very strong due to construct incorrespondence.

The causal linkage between job satisfaction and policy performance is not clear, as is the case in the job satisfaction – job performance relationship. Implementing the policy effectively can be very satisfying and, in turn, be caused by the general satisfaction of the public sector worker. Next, the degree of powerlessness can influence the relationship. When public sector professionals for example experience more discretion, they will have greater opportunity for attitudes and motives to affect behavior, making the satisfaction- performance relationship stronger (cf. Judge et al: 391). We therefore posit the following hypothesis:

H3: Job satisfaction and policy performance are correlated

3.4   A conceptual model of policy alienation

Based on our theoretical exploration we expect that the degree of policy alienation public sector professionals experience could result in the following effects.
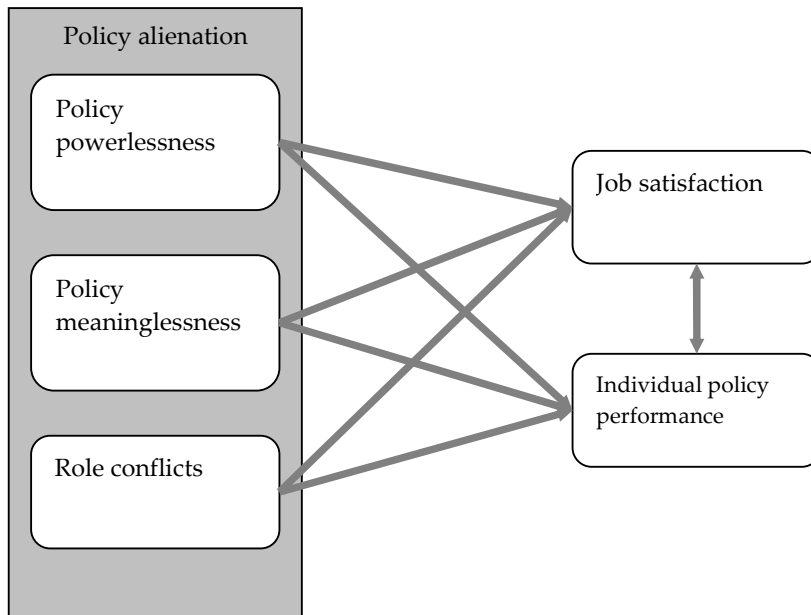
Figure 1 Conceptual framework, possible important effects of (the dimensions of) policy alienation

With respect to this model, some remarks have to be made. First, policy alienation is conceptualized as the sum of the dimensions policy powerlessness, policy meaninglessness and role conflicts. We expect that policy powerlessness, policy meaninglessness and the degree of role conflicts all influence the degree of job satisfaction negatively. Next, these dimensions influence the degree of policy performance negatively. Further, we also expect that job satisfaction and policy performance are related. The causal linkages between these two variables, however, are unclear.

4   Exploratory case study of teachers implementing reform ´the Second Phase´

The main research question 'How can policy alienation be conceptualized and what consequences does the occurrence of policy alienation have' is now being examined by means of an exploratory case study. The study is exploratory, as the available literature and existing knowledge base of the concept and its effects is poor. This exploratory study is a case study, as we investigate "how" and "why" questions (how can policy alienation be understood and which effects does it have) in a contemporary set of events over which we have no control (Yin, 2003:9). Conducting this exploratory case study gains insight in the phenomenon and makes it possible to theoretically generalize the findings to build a more substantive theory of policy alienation.

We research the degree of policy alienation of teachers from the ´Second Phase´ policy they have to implement. This case is chosen because educational innovation literature increasingly emphasizes the crucial role of teachers in reform success or failure (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Next, this specific reform is perceived the teachers as a substantive and thorough change (Kirschner & Prins, 2008:134). Possible effects could therefore more easily be discerned. A document analysis is conducted based on newspaper articles, academic texts and policy documentation. Some policy documentation were documents of the parliamentary commission 'Education innovations' (2008). This ad-hoc commission had the task to evaluate three big educational reforms of the late 90s, one of them being the Second Phase. The documents of this commission provide a rich source of information, among which a) a final report (cited as Commission, 2008), b) qualitative research: several interviews with teachers, education experts and former Ministers of Education (Commission: Interviews, 2008) and c) a large scale survey research of 775 Second Phase teachers, performed by scholars in the field of education (Kirschner & Prins, 2008).

Two main limitations have to be taken into account in our empirical analysis. First, case studies are by definition difficult to empirically generalize. The purpose is however not to generalize empirically, but to generalize theoretically. The second limitation comes from the biased nature of many sources in the content analysis, being mainly newspaper-articles and articles from pressure groups. We used academic articles and the scientifically designed and executed survey research of the parliamentary commission to limit the impact of this disadvantage.

4.1   Background

In 1998 a large reform was implemented in the upper levels of Dutch secondary school. This reform aims to prepare students better for university by learning them to work independently, acquire practical skills to apply their knowledge and obtain more integrated knowledge. The implementation of this 'Second Phase' was an ambitious change which consisted of three elements (Van Veen, 2003:87):

1.   The implementation of a 'constructivist' view of teaching and learning, called the Study House
2.   The use of student study profiles. Students can choose between four profiles: a cultural profile (culture and society), an economic (economics and society), and two beta profiles (nature and health or nature and technology)
3.   New and more detailed student qualification structures together with new subjects.

The first element needs some clarification. It signifies the most important change for the work of the teachers (Van der Werf, 2005). The new, constructivist view differs from the more traditional behaviorist view, which was the basis for the training of most teachers (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996). Behaviorist views emphasize the process of knowledge transmission and the expert role of the teacher rather that the learning activities of students. The teacher plays a central role in the delivery of knowledge and is assumed to be the authority responsible for the dissemination of knowledge. In contrast, current constructivist views concentrate on the process of learning and the role of the student in particular. Learning is assumed to be an active process of construction, and knowledge is assumed to be the accumulation of information, as opposed to passive assimilation. The teacher is no longer the deliverer of knowledge but the facilitator of active learning. Practical implications are for example less ´traditional classes´ (one teacher explaining the material to 30 students at once). Instead, the students are learning the subject material more independently and in small groups, the teacher acting as a facilitator of this process, helping when necessary.

Schools are not legally obligated to implement this constructivist view, or the Study House, although most schools are currently doing so. This can be a result of the fact that, although there is not legal obligation, the education inspection often uses it in evaluations (Commission: Interviews, 2008:74). Next, some claim that the inspection pressured the schools to implement the Study House (NRC, 2007b). The choice can therefore not be seen as without obligation (NRC, 2003; Van der Ploeg, Imelman, Meijer, & Wagenaar, 1999). The manner and degree in which the schools implement the Study House does differ, however (Commission: Interviews, 2008:96).

The Second Phase was reformed several times. As a result of student demonstrations, in 1999 the exam requirements are being relaxed and the number of projects for students declined. In 2006, the study profiles were adapted (OC&W, 2007). In 2007, the 'renewed Second Phase' was implemented, including many changes, concentrating on the second and third element of the original Second Phase. The process of changes is important in understanding the dynamics of this reform.

In the next sections we examine the degree of policy alienation of teachers from the reform 'The Second Phase', as well as its effects. This is done by looking at the different dimensions of policy alienation; policy powerlessness, policy meaninglessness and role conflicts.

4.2 Policy powerlessness

Powerlessness may be the result of not being able to influence the contents of a policy program. What degree of powerlessness did teachers experience and which effects did occur?

Influence at the strategic level

We found hardly any evidence that the teachers were able to influence the shaping of the Second Phase on a strategic level. In general, many teachers perceive that educational reforms are implemented in a top-down way, as a survey of 12.500 teachers showed (Volkskrant, 2006). Van Veen (2003:91) states that 'with regard to the teachers themselves, they are considered 'independent professionals' on paper but when it comes to the actual implementation of the current changes they are just the 'executors' of the ideas of others'. The Second Phase was no exception. Teachers felt that its implementation was done in a top-down way, without consulting the teachers (NRC, 2007a; Prick, 2006:160-161). The labor unions had some saying in the reforms, but were not fully representative of the teachers (Commission, 2008:52; Hemmer, 2007:72). Smaller professional associations, often subject-based, also did not have a lot of influence, which was mainly due to their lack of collaboration. They had different and often contradictory goals, resulting in an inability to lobby together efficiently (Commission: Interviews, 2008:61,69,106).

The high degree of strategic powerlessness had a number of effects. One important effect was that the Second Phase was being implemented without sufficient funds for the teachers to implement the reform successfully. Funds were needed for, among else, training for the teachers -who had to teach new subjects- and changes in the infrastructure in schools – needed for the new way of teaching. The chairman of the AOB is sometimes seen as responsible for the insufficient funds, as he lowered his demands considerably (from €160 million to €22,3 million) (Commission: Interviews, 2008:77). The end-result was seen as completely insufficient by his rank and file (Commission, 2008:52). In the large scale survey, 85% of the teachers agreed with the statement that that there was not enough time and money available for the implementation of the Second Phase (Kirschner & Prins, 2008). This obviously made the working conditions for the teachers more difficult.

Related are the effects of lower job satisfaction and a lower (overall) policy performance. One teacher stated as the secret of successful reform: 'Not dictated from the top' (NRC, 2007b). The parliamentary commission notes:

> Too often reforms are being implemented by government, management and consultants, without a substantive debate in the school and involvement of teachers in this debate. Because of this, the teacher does not perceive himself part of the reform. This negatively effects his own job satisfaction and the chances of successful implementation of the reform' (Commission, 2008:104)

Concluding, we can state that teachers did not have a substantial influence on the shaping of the Second Phase. This resulted in several negative (related) effects, among which lower available funds, lower job satisfaction and a lower overall policy performance.

Influence at the tactical level

Tactical powerlessness refers to the perceived influence of the teachers concerning the way the Second Phase is implemented in the school. Kips (2003:48) posits that teachers, although they could not influence the policy on a strategic level, did have influence on the concretization of the Second Phase (in particular, the Study House) in their schools. In a survey of 142 teachers, 45% did (fully) agree with the statement that they had enough opportunities to influence the way the Study House was implemented, against 28,4% who did not agree (avg. 3,13, 5 point Likert scale) (Kips, 2003). This correlated positively with their job satisfaction. But in some schools, the Study House was implemented without consulting the teachers. Prick (2006:119) states that in these schools ´school management dictates how the Study House has to be modeled. This causes tensions, passive resistance of teachers who are forced to work in a way they perceive as meaningless and students who use internet to write their papers, not learning much´.

Although many teachers did feel they could influence the policy in their school on some aspects, they could not effectively influence their workload, which increased significantly with the introduction of the Second Phases (Hemmer, 2007:17). In a sense, we can state that because they could not address this perverse effect effectively, the high workload could persist. Reasons for this increased workload are that teachers had to develop new and more study guides, had more meetings and had to attend more retraining courses (Hemmer, 2007:84). Besides this, their administrative tasks increased significantly (Kips, 2003:36). This had to be done while no extra funding or time was available (NRC, 2007c). The outcome was that 80% of the teachers experienced a higher workload (Kips, 2003:59; Tweede Fase Adviespunt, 2005:14). In the literature a higher work load often correlates both significantly and negatively with job satisfaction (G. Tummers, 2003). This also seems to be happening in the case of the teachers implementing the Second Phase, as the job satisfaction of teachers declined and they named workload as one of the primary reasons.

In conclusion we can state that the teachers perceived to have a general influence on the way the Second Phase was implemented, which correlates positively with their job satisfaction. But they could not influence their workload. This in turn decreased their job satisfaction.

Influence at the operational level
How did the new policy influence the operational powerlessness of the teachers? In general we can state that the discretion of the teachers has declined. In a survey of 142 Second Phase teachers, 75% (completely) agreed with the statement 'because of the introduction of the Second Phase it became more difficult to deviate from the official program' (Kips, 2003:54). This can be seen as an indicator for discretion. Reasons for this decreased discretion are to be found in role of the educational publishers, national inspection and national pedagogic centers. In the Second Phase, the policy goals were deliberately held vague. The educational publishers had to concretize this in their schoolbooks. In this way, the methods offered to the schools 'defined for a large extent both the substance as well as the didactics of what had to be learned' (Commission, 2008:137). The didactical freedom for the teachers further declined as both the education inspection and national pedagogical centers enforced the new, constructivist way of teaching. Next, the increasing influence of managers seems to be a factor for decreased discretion as 'the autonomy of the teacher has decreased slowly, managers have become more powerful' (NRC, 2007d:2). This was possible as the autonomy of the schools increased in the Second Phase, which often resulted in an increased power of the management (Hemmer, 2007).

The decreased discretion had numerous results. First, it correlated negatively with job satisfaction (Kips, 2003). Second, professional associations are trying to regain the autonomy for the teachers. This is for example shown by a lately held symposium 'Teacher: authority or subject', concerning the pedagogic-organizational autonomy of the teacher in relation to school management. Next, the general education union is developing a professional statute. This is seen as valuable for the teachers, and primarily introduced 'to counter the top-down enforcement of public policy' (Commission, 2008:104).

4.3   Policy meaninglessness
Meaninglessness refers to the perception of the teacher about the contribution of the policy to a larger purpose, and can occur at the strategic, tactical and operational level.

Strategic level
The official objective of the Second Phase is to increase the education quality in the Dutch upper secondary school (Tweede Fase Adviespunt, 2005:12). More specifically, it aims at providing a better connection between the upper secondary school and higher education. To provide this goal a modernization of the curriculum is needed. This is aimed for by providing more autonomy for schools in their choice of organizational and financial structure, and (formally) in their method in education.

The evidence concerning the meaninglessness of the goals of the Second Phase as perceived by the teachers is mixed. Kips (2003:49) in her survey of 142 teachers, found that most teachers do agree with the goals of the Second Phase: 66,4% (completely) agrees, while 10% (completely) disagrees (avg. 3,6). One teacher expresses his agreement as follows: 'The goal of the Second Phase as it was once formulated, to improve the connection with higher education, is excellent' (Commission: Interviews, 2008:632). The survey-research of the parliamentary commission, however, shows a different picture: 'teachers are not convinced at all by the reasons the government gives for the introduction of the Second Phase. (…) A negative opinion with regard to the goals of the introduction of the Second Phase prevails' (Kirschner & Prins, 2008).

This difference is not easy to explain, but one important factor is many policy changes which occurred in the period between the surveys. While Kips surveyed the teachers in 2003, the parliamentary survey was held in 2008. In time, a number of policy changes occurred both outside and within the Second Phase, possibly increasing the meaninglessness of the policy. The NRC (2007a:10) notes that 'It was very difficult for teachers to keep up with the many policy changes.'. Prick (2006) states that many teachers are unhappy about the number of reforms being thrown upon them, which results in a lower job satisfaction. Within the Second Phase, there were major shifts in content and sometimes even the goals changed (NRC, 2007a). One teacher expresses his frustration as follows:

> In the preamble of the Second Phase law the explicit goal was increasing the level of education. The support was very high in the beginning. Teachers were getting part of their subject back. But the politicians did not stand firm. The first student demonstration already nullified a lot of things which were not yet even being implemented. We did not get the time to try it out. (…) That is the frustration. We always start 'con amore' with implementing policy. It is very discouraging when the policy changes every time.
> Teacher about the Second Phase (cited in Commission: Interviews, 2008:648)

Another factor which influences the perceived meaninglessness of the goals of the Second Phase is the type of teacher. Some teachers do agree with the goals of the Second Phase, while others do not. Van Veen (2003:103) states that 'teachers do not constitute a monolithic block with the same attitudes, educational philosophy, subjective educational theory, values, or orientations towards the professional, pedagogical, and organizational aspects of their work'. He discerns two broad types of teachers in his dissertation. On the one hand teachers who are learning- or student-oriented and considered personal and moral development to be among the goals of education. On the other hand there are teachers who are content- or teacher-oriented and considered qualification to be more or less the only goal of education. Looking at the two types of teachers, we can state that the constructivist orientation of teaching fits better with the first group, while the more traditional, behaviorist view matches the second group of teachers. We notice that learning-oriented teachers had a more positive perception of the meaningfulness of the reform: 'A significant positive relationship exists between the approval of the goals of the reform and the orientation towards learning and students' (Kips, 2003:50-51). One such teacher expressed his agreement of the Study House concept as follows:

> The role of the mentor in the Study house becomes so much more important and only for that already, I'm very happy with this change. You know, large schools run the risk of letting students drowned, and especially now the Study house where they are supposed to be so much more independent. But besides that, already for years I had the feeling that many students just did not get enough attention.
> Teacher about the Second Phase (cited in Van Veen, 2003:60-61)

On the other hand, teachers with a more traditional view on teaching appreciated the Second Phase significantly less (Kips, 2003; Van Veen, 2003:127). In this way, the orientation as teacher has towards his job, strongly influences the perceived meaninglessness of the goals of the Second Phase.

A number of results arise from the degree of strategic meaninglessness teachers perceive. Kips (2003:56) focuses on the effects of job satisfaction, workload and motivation and concludes that

'agreeing with the goals of the Second Phase (…) is of eminent importance for teachers' job satisfaction, workload and motivation'.

Tactical level

At the tactical level, meaninglessness is based on the perception of the professional regarding the contribution of the school to the handling of specific problems or the delivery of public goods.

According to the teachers, management was often not capable of implementing the Second Phase properly. More than 50% of the teachers perceived this being the case (Kirschner & Prins, 2008:133). Important factors here were insufficient funds, as well as the complexity of the reform and time-pressure to implement it (Commission, 2008:134). This resulted in a) overburdened teachers, unable to handle the higher workload and b) a lower support for the policy.

But in some schools management proved sufficiently capable. They often used the autonomy given to them by the policy to implement only the minimum requirements of the Second Phase. These schools did often not fully implement the Study House. In this way, the schools could cope with the problems of funding, necessary infrastructure changes and late delivery of books. This was seen by the teachers as very meaningful and increased the (perceived) performance of the policy. Concerning the implementation process of the Second Phase teachers perceived they owed implementation success primarily to this so-called 'low-profile' implementation:

> Because of the 'low-profile' implementation of the Second Phase the changes were not very big at our school. New subjects were being teached fairly traditionally which prevented organizational malfunctioning.
> > Teacher about the Second Phase (cited in Commission, 2008:134)

> Actually, nothing went wrong because the total package was introduced gradually and also low-profile. In this way the total was well prepared and implemented.
> > Teacher about the Second Phase (cited in Commission, 2008:134)

Concluding, we can state that management was perceived by many teachers as unable to implement the policy properly, resulting in overburdened teachers and lower support. In some cases though, schools could effectively cope with the constraints of the policy by implementing only the minimum requirements of the policy. This was seen as very meaningful by the teachers and resulted in more (perceived) policy performance.

Operational level

At the operational level, meaninglessness refers to the teacher's perception of the contribution of his own job or his own activities to deal with concrete and individual cases. For instance, is he really able to help his students? And if not, what are the effects?

Many teachers experience that their contribution while implementing the Second Phase was not meaningful. For instance, only 8% perceives that their implementation of the Second Phase increased the motivation of the students. Next, only 7% perceives that the students got more equal chances (Kips, 2003:54). They also feel that their authority on the students diminished, making it more difficult to influence the results of the students (Nierop, 2004:24). Overall, teachers seem to be experiencing a high degree of operational meaninglessness:

> The teachers believe that the implementation of the Second Phase negatively influenced the grades of the students and the way they learn. They are very explicit about the negative influence of the Second Phase on the motivation of the students and the quality of the lessons.
> > Commission (2008:139)

Some teachers, however, feel that their implementation of the Second Phase is very meaningful. These reactions are often expressed by more student- or learning-centered teachers. Two of them told expressed their feelings as follows:

> I feel... well, it gives me more satisfaction because... this new way of teaching fits me so much more. Absolutely. Much more than the frontal way of teaching. I felt myself fail so many times then. I would see a child who was really unhappy but have to focus on the subject matter because I had to finish the chapter, you know... and now I really have time to pay attention to one child.
>
> Teacher about the Second Phase (cited in Van Veen, 2003:60)

> I think, to give the students the responsibility for their own learning is a good thing... very important... that they learn because they themselves are convinced of the relevancy, and not because I am the one that thinks it is important. I see that most students are more motivated when I give them more responsibility, which... stimulates me... that feels good...yes, it makes teaching for me more challenging, so much more.
>
> Teacher about the Second Phase (cited in Van Veen, 2003:61)

Concluding, the above shows that teachers overall experience a high degree of operational meaninglessness. This negatively influences their degree of job satisfaction, motivation as well as the (perceived) performance of the policy. But this differed between types of teachers, as with the other forms of meaninglessness. A content-oriented teacher often experiences a high degree of operational meaninglessness, while for a student-oriented teacher implementing the Second Phase is very meaningful.

4.4   Role conflicts

In this case we observe two role conflicts. Role conflicts are always present in the work of teachers (Nierop, 2004:30). Below, we examine which role conflicts have intensified or weakened because of the introduction of the Second Phase, as well as its effects.

The first role conflict emerges from the tension between the provisional (management) logic and the professional logic. School managers want the work to be done as effectively and efficiently as possible. This does not correspond with the thoughts of some teachers: 'The agenda of the school management appears to be quite different [from the teacher's agenda] and shows a remarkable correspondence to that of the government: namely very managerial with the expectation that teachers simply execute their policy' (Van Veen, 2003:93). This causes feelings of discomfort. This role conflict in sometimes intensified because of the introduction of the Second Phase, where schools became more autonomous. This led to an increased bureaucratization: more management and fewer funds for the primary process (Commission, 2008:9). As stated before, this resulted in a lower discretion of the teachers. Another effect of the increased school autonomy was that many school managers wanted teachers to participate in all kinds of activities. This was not welcomed by the more content-oriented teachers:

> That is also a change that annoys me. Well yes, the fact that the school more and more thinks that many other tasks also belong to the work of teachers. For instance, you can think of the mentoring of students, which is an extra task since last year. Or something which I did informally, taking students to a play in the theatre, that has become now the task of a new committee (…). Why it annoys me? Because I'm already very busy with the task, which was the reason I became a teacher, namely teaching, educating my students.
>
> Teacher about the Second Phase (cited in Van Veen, 2003:66)

Student-oriented teachers, however, perceive this required participation as valuable. They can for example support each other as teachers during meetings. They see participation in school policy-matters more positively than the content-oriented teachers, experiencing less role conflicts. In so, they experience more job satisfaction.

The second role conflict emerges from the tensions between the Study House concept (provisional and institutional logic) and the demands of (some) of the students (client logic). This is closely linked to the operational meaninglessness professionals experience. In theory, the goals of

these two groups do not conflict at all. The main goal of the Second Phase was to increase the level of education, which would be welcomed by most students. But in practice, the Second Phase – in particular the Study House – did conflict with the demands of the students. As stated previously, many teachers perceive that, because of the Second Phase students a) do not get equal chances, b) their motivation declined and c) their grades decreased. Van der Werf describes this problem as follows: ´Concluding, we can state that the new way of learning [the Study House] in the best case does not lead to favorable effects for students, and that in some aspects even leads to negative results. ´(Van der Werf, 2005:32). The effects of this role conflict are similar to the effects of operational meaninglessness. It affects the performance of the policy, the job satisfaction and the motivation of the teachers.

4.5   Overview of findings

The results of the case study are shown in Figure 2:
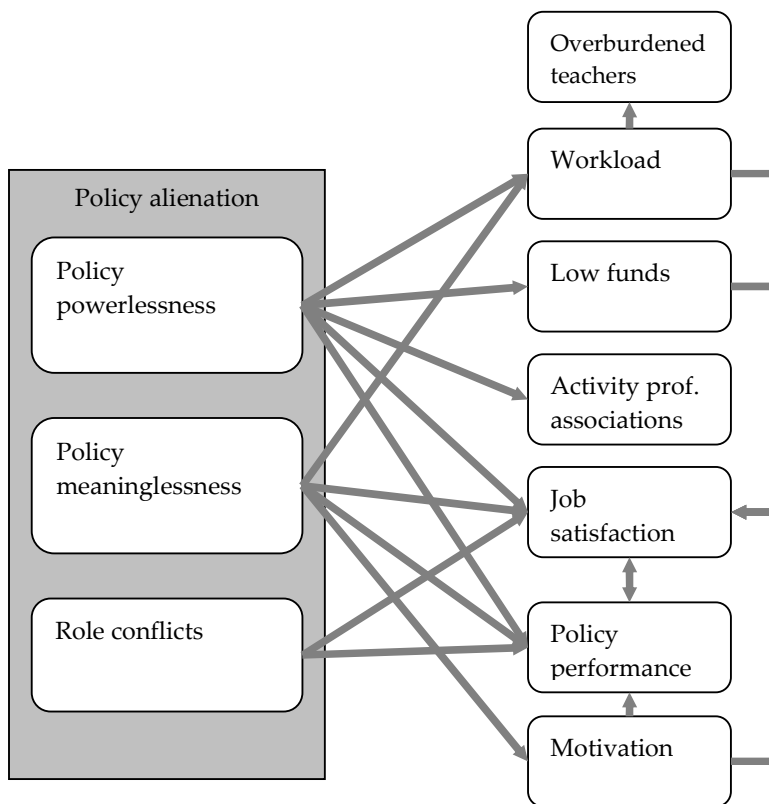
Figure 2 Main effects of policy alienation of Dutch teachers implementing the Second Phase

Some remarks can be made. First, we should note that this is a simplified model, where for the sake of parsimony only the most important relations are shown.

        Looking at the dimension powerlessness, we can state that in general there was a high degree of powerlessness. On the strategic level, this resulted in a lower availability of funds for the implementation of the Second Phase. The high degree of tactical powerlessness resulted in a high workload, as the teachers could not effectively influence this perverse effect of the Second Phase. The high degree of operational powerlessness resulted in increased activity of the professional associations. In this way, they are trying to cancel this threat on the autonomy of professionals (operational powerlessness). All dimensions of powerlessness have an influence on job satisfaction and on policy performance. The relationship between job satisfaction and policy performance is interesting. We noticed that these variables are clearly related, but we could not determine the exact nature of the causality in our exploratory study. For now, we propose a reciprocal causality. Teachers

are less satisfied because they feel they are not increasing the level of education for the students (decreasing motivation of the students, overall unfavorable effects for the students). But their satisfaction also seems to be influencing their policy performance. Student-oriented teachers are more satisfied, and are therefore executing the Second Phase more effectively.

The degree of policy meaninglessness differed between teachers. More content-oriented teachers seem to be experiencing a high degree of meaninglessness, while the more student-oriented teachers see the Second Phase as meaningful on all three levels. In a similar way, the role conflicts differed between the types of teachers, content-oriented teachers experiencing more role conflicts. The effects of the dimensions meaninglessness and role conflicts are similar, both influencing job satisfaction, workload, motivation and policy performance.

5   Conclusion and discussion

We described and analyzed the identification problems that public professionals experience with the implementation of public policies in terms of policy alienation. The policy alienation concept introduces the body of literature concerning job alienation, coming from the field of sociology of work and organization, in the public administration discipline. By doing this, we want to contribute to the contemporary debate of the important and often contested role of professionals working the public sector (Hebson et al., 2003; Pratchett & Wingfield, 1996). Introducing the alienation concept in this debate could yield to new fundamental insights.

Policy alienation is defined as the mode of experience in which the public professional, who on a regular basis interacts directly with clients, cannot identify himself with the public policy he has to implement. Policy alienation occurs when a professional a) cannot influence the policy b) perceives the policy as meaningless and c) experiences conflicts between different groups (for example clients and management) because of the policy.

Our exploratory case study of teachers in upper secondary education implementing the Second Phase shows that the concept may be important in explaining tensions public professionals face when they implement a new policy. For this reason, the concept is useful to analyze the problems public professionals face implementing government policies. Policy alienation seems to have a number of important effects. First, the stated goals and objectives of a policy seem to be reached to a lesser extent when many professionals implementing this policy experience policy alienation. Next, low job satisfaction seems to be an important effect of a high degree of policy alienation. Another effect, which was not hypothesized, is the increased activity of the professional associations. When many professionals experience problems with a public policy, the professional associations try to resolve these problems. In our case study we observed that professional associations developed a professional statute to regain the autonomy of the teacher, as this autonomy decreased substantially after the introduction of the Second Phase. We also identified an important factor influencing policy alienation. The values of a professional seem to be influencing particularly two dimensions of policy alienation: meaninglessness and role conflicts. When a professional has corresponding values or orientations with the policy he has to implement, he will not perceive the policy as meaningless. Next, he will also experience less role conflicts. In our case study, we identified two broad categories of teachers. One the one hand teachers who are learning- or student-oriented and considered personal and moral development to be among the goals of education. On the other hand there are teachers who are content- or teacher-oriented and considered qualification to be more or less the only goal of education. The first group experienced the Second Phase as very meaningful and did not experience role conflicts, while the Second Group had more problems with implementing the Second Phase, seeing the reform as meaningless and experiencing intensified role conflicts.

The policy alienation concept seems to be important in explaining tensions professionals experience when implementing policy. Further research is therefore needed to scientifically ground the concept and to be able to use it as a tool for policy makers in the public sector. First, other cases could be explored to strengthen the concept and the theoretical framework. Particular attention could be paid to the role of managers on the degree of policy alienation of professionals. When a new policy

has to be implemented, are managers able to 'buffer' the possible perverse impacts of this implementation for the professionals, making these less bound to alienate from it?

Second, using an extended theoretical framework, the factors, the dimensions of the concept and the effects could be studied more systematically to explore the relative strength of the different relationships, making it clear for policy makers where interventions could be appropriate to reduce the degree of policy alienation and where government (in all its variety) can come to better, more meaningful relationships with their citizens.

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