MASARYK UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL STUDIES

HABILITATION THESIS

Implementation of Labour Market Policy by Street-Level Bureaucrats in Public Administration Affecting Regional and Social Development: Analytical Model and Its Application

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ABSTRACT

In this habilitation thesis, we examine the topic of implementation of public policy at the regional and local levels, shaped and carried out by frontline workers, often called "line workers" or "street-level bureaucrats". Those in the environment of public administration organisations, usually called "line bureaucracies", come into daily contact with diverse groups of citizens, to whom they provide public services and thereby influence the possibilities for regional and social development in the locality where they operate. Some groups of citizens can be supported, motivated, or possibly advantaged by these workers, e.g., women, older people, people with health disabilities, etc. Others, on the contrary, can be disadvantaged, e.g., ethnic minorities, homeless people, people with addictive behaviour, etc. In this way, they can either contribute to or hinder the region's economic development and the improvement or deterioration of these people's current standard of living.

We are following the classic concept/theory of "street-level bureaucracy" by the American political scientist Michael Lipsky and his many followers. We currently consider this topic to be significant for several reasons. The first is that the above-mentioned frontline workers are not merely "implementers" of public and social policies created by actors at the central level of government, but rather their actual "policy-makers". They influence the way and form in which policies are provided, and thus also the potential impacts and effects on their users, the citizens. The second reason is the fact that the results of policies are not entirely predictable, because the political-administrative systems that ensure the implementation and methods of managing policies, the actors within these systems responsible for their functioning and implementation, the processes taking place within these systems, the external socio-economic, environmental, cultural and demographic environment of the country and the problems of the policy target groups are diverse, complex and not completely programmable in advance. The third reason is the numerous public administration and social reforms that have taken place and are still ongoing in many countries worldwide, aimed at maximising organisational performance, services, and profits, or at comprehensively solving user problems through personalised so-called "tailor-made" services. This significantly influences the working environment of frontline workers, the way in which and to whom policies are provided or withheld, and, in turn, the extent to which the relevant region is developed or underdeveloped. The above facts illustrate the complexity of public policy implementation, which is challenging to grasp analytically and examine thoroughly. For this reason, the "too many variables problem" is often mentioned (Goggin et al., 1990), because there are many cases and variables. At the same time, the "problem of the relationship between the resulting policy and the policy formed and implemented" is mentioned, which concerns the difficulties in choosing adequate methods to analyse the implementation of public policy (Hill & Hupe, 2021). These facts indicate that a "unified implementation theory" or a more complex "general explanatory model" has not yet been successfully developed, but only partial analytical "frameworks" or "models".

In this work, we aim to partially address this problem by asking: *"What key factors and how do they influence the ways in which public policy is formed and provided by frontline workers in the environment of local implementing organisations and thus its resulting form, which affects regional and social development?"* For these purposes, we have created an analytical tool called the "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by

Frontline Workers". It enables us to understand the possible causes and consequences of frontline workers' actions when providing public policy to various groups of citizens. Its potential lies mainly in the ability to identify specific types of causal factors, evaluate the degree of their influence, and subsequently consider the possibilities and, if necessary, specific ways to influence them and thereby the way in which public policy is provided and its resulting form, which has an impact on regional and social development. The universal nature of this model enables its use to understand the implementation of various public and social policies and the public services they provide, e.g., in employment, education, housing, healthcare, security, and other areas. These are often delivered by different types of frontline workers who deal with various citizens. We demonstrate the practical use of this model in our analysis of the implementation of active labour market policy in two selected regions of the Czech Republic. This yielded several interesting findings, which we compared with the previous findings of various mainly foreign research.

In this "model" we have created, we see following "theoretical", "methodological", "analytical" and "empirical" benefits: (i) no domestic or foreign authors have yet created such a complex model, (ii) which is open and flexible in nature in that it allows for re-validation and possible incorporating other additional variables to its individual areas and sub-areas, (iii) based on findings obtained from its use in practice in empirical research, which can use various methods, mainly qualitative, but also quantitative or mixed and types of analysis at the micro- and meso-level, ideally comparative, and (iv) which allows for obtaining specific information and thus understanding the processes of public policy implementation at the street level within one implementing organisation or between multiple implementing organisations in various social, political and organisational contexts in a given state or between different states.

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INTRODUCTION

In the presented work, we deal with the topic of “the implementation of public policy at the line level” shaped and implemented by line workers (so-called “street-level bureaucrats”), who in the environment of public administration organisations (so-called “street-level bureaucracies”) come into daily contact with diverse groups of citizens to whom they provide public services[1]. Typically, these include social workers, counsellors, case managers, teachers, police officers, and other workers involved in criminal proceedings, as well as judges, public lawyers, and other court officials or health professionals (for more details, see Lipsky 1980: 3–4). The way in which, to what extent, quality, and to which groups of citizens these workers provide services has a direct or indirect impact on the regional and social development of the given locality in which these workers operate. These workers can support, motivate, or even provide benefits to specific groups of citizens and seek to involve them as fully as possible in everyday society, for example, women, older adults, or people with disabilities. In this way, they can significantly contribute to the region's economic development and to improving the current standard of living of these people. On the contrary, they can disadvantage other groups of citizens, thereby contributing neither to the development of the region nor to the improvement of the quality of life of these people, for example, ethnic minorities, homeless people, people with addictive behaviour, etc.

This topic has traditionally been the focus of interest in both so-called “implementation studies”, which examine and understand the process of public policy implementation, and the literature on the “public policy process”. Implementation has traditionally been, and is still considered by some experts, to be one of the phases of the so-called public policy cycle, which begins with agenda setting and policy formulation and continues with the process of implementation, evaluation, and the resulting comparison of whether the original objectives that the policy aims at have been achieved. Given that this topic is multi-layered and complex, its understanding requires expertise from a wide range of social science disciplines. In addition to political scientists and experts in public administration, there are

[1] Even though it is common to use the term "line bureaucrat" to refer to line workers who implement public and social policies in the state administration environment, in the following text we also use the term "line workers", even though we are aware that not all line workers in state administration are line bureaucrats, as Maynard-Moody and Portillo (2010, p. 263) point out (for more details, see subchapter 2.1).

experts specialising in public policy, public management, law, and organisational theory, who focus, among other things, on the behaviour and processes of interaction and communication within organisations.

Examining the implementation of public policy – or rather, individual public and social policies – from a line perspective is significant for several reasons. The first rests in the fact that the above-mentioned line workers are not mere "implementers of policies" or "receivers of policies" created by actors at the central level of government, but de facto "policy-makers" who significantly determine how policies in the form of various public services are provided and thus what their final form is and what their potential impacts and effects are on their users among citizens (for more details, see Chapter 2, subchapter 2.1.1). The second reason is the fact that (i) political-administrative systems that ensure the implementation and management of particular policies, (ii) actors within these systems who are responsible for the functioning of the systems and the implementation of policies, (iii) processes taking place within these systems that ensure the functioning of the systems and the implementation of policies, as well as (iv) the external socio-economic, environmental, cultural and demographic environment of the country, which influences the functioning of the systems and the actions of the actors within them, and (v) the problems of citizens that are to be solved by these policies, all of this is diverse, complex and not fully programmable in advance, which means that (vi) the results of policies are not entirely predictable. The significance of this topic and this perspective is evidenced by the large number of authors who have addressed it since its inception and by the increase in recent years (for more details, see Chapter 1, subchapter 1.2). The third reason is the numerous public administration and social reforms undertaken in most developed countries over the past few decades. These have often had a significant impact on how public services are provided and on the target groups they serve. The risk of intentional or unintentional exclusion of certain groups of citizens from these services and/or of unequal treatment has become particularly problematic (see Chapter 2, subchapter 2.1.3). Excluding these people from services may lead to their nonparticipation in society, thereby affecting the regional and social development of their communities.

What changes specifically occurred as a result of these reforms, and what impact did they have on the provision of public services by line workers?

In the vast majority of countries, reforms of "governance" have taken place, which have been manifested in particular by (i) the expansion of traditional, especially state actors involved in public policy-making to include other state and especially non-state actors, (ii) the merger of many state organisations, (iii) the increase in various forms of cooperation mainly in the form of "co-creation" and thus „collaboration" between state authorities and other organisations of the public, private and non-profit sectors[2], and (iv) the introduction of "new public management"[3] into state administration. In particular, the introduction of "neoliberal principles" within the framework of "new public management" into state administration, often referred to as "new managerialism", significantly impacted the implementation of individual public and social policies. This trend has led, among other things, to (i) the marketization of services and later in some countries to their partial de-marketization, (ii) the introduction of new forms of standardization of work procedures used by line workers by setting performance targets and indicators and at the same time monitoring and comparison processes (in many countries these have been combined with existing methods of standardization), (iii) the use of new relationships between service providers and citizens perceived as customers, e.g., in the form of activation contracts and individual action plans in labour market policy, or (iv) the decentralization of decision-making and at the same time in many countries to the combination of centralized and decentralized decision-making (for more details, see e.g., Caswell, Larsen, van Berkel & Kupka, 2017; Page et al., 2021; Radnor, Osborne, & Glennon, 2022; Ansell, Sørensen & Torfing, 2023; Seo, Bryson & Crosby, 2023; Toft et al., 2023; Clarke & Newman, 2024; Gofen, Rønning & Sønderskov, 2025; Li & George, 2025).

Management used in public administration in countries where these principles have been implemented aims to maximize organisational performance, services and profits, and to do so mainly uses (i) cost-cutting, (ii) increased regulation, (iii) privatisation of services,

[2] This trend is often referred to as the "hybridisation of line bureaucracy" (Klenk & Cohen, 2019), a manifestation of "hybrid governance" (Hupe & Meijs, 2000), and is often associated with "hybrid professionalism" (Noordegraaf, 2015).

[3] Neoliberalism is an ideology that manifests itself in many ways. It is most often associated with privatisation, decentralisation, and the integration of entrepreneurial ideologies and market rationalities into non-entrepreneurial entities (Harvey, 2005; Peck & Tickell, 2007; Matarase & Caswell, 2018; Knafo, 2020). New public management represents an "organisational model" for implementing this ideology, which is "a set of assumptions and value statements about how public sector organisations should be designed, organised, managed and how, in a quasi-business manner, they should function" (Diefenbach, 2009, p. 893).

(iv) re-engineering (i.e. redesign of organisational processes) and (v) evidence-based management (Cunliffe, 2009). An example of increased regulation is the assertive and persistent control of line workers by managers of local implementing organisations over expenditure and achievement of performance targets using "procedural manuals". These are intended to manage the process of allocating resources to clients based on demand criteria and methods for recording information to track performance indicators (Evans, 2011, 2016; cf. Wittberg, Larsson & Olaison, 2024). In the standardisation of work procedures and interactions between line workers and clients, there is often a reduction in the space for clients to express themselves and to participate in jointly solving their problems with staff[4].

The reforms mentioned above have directly changed the organisational context in which line workers provide their services. It has been shown that stricter conditionality of the services provided significantly affects in particular: (i) the "tasks achieved by line workers" focused on providing active, passive or combined measures to citizens, (ii) the "specialization of tasks" focused on selected groups of citizens with specific characteristics, (iii) the "types of citizens to whom services are provided", e.g., by expanding to include people with more complex problems and (iv) the "recruitment strategy of line workers", where in most countries some public and social policies do not emphasize that workers should be members of a specific profession – typically employment policies (e.g., Caswell, Kupka, Larsen & van Berkel, 2017; Kaźmierczak & Rymsza, 2017; Kupka & Osiander, 2017; Bolhaar, Ketel & Klaauw, 2020; van Berkel, de Vries & van der Aa, 2020; McGann, 2023).

A key change that has occurred as a result of social reforms at the line level is the "personalisation of services", or the so-called "meta-policy of personalisation" (Needham, 2020), when the services provided are so-called "person-centred" (see, e.g., Khoronzhevych & Fadyl, 2022; Carter et al., 2025). Their essence is often the assertive demand by citizens for line workers to use technologies that enable the provision of individualised services (Hupe & Evans, 2020; Andersson, Hallin & Ivory, 2022; Ejjami, 2024). In fact, it is about promoting an ethos of customer care in public services, which can be

[4] An example is the findings of Matarese and Caswell (2018), who analysed the degree of standardisation of interviews between social workers and homeless clients. Workers who strictly followed work procedures and therefore used predetermined interview questions left clients little room for expression. In contrast, workers who did not follow these procedures gave clients more space to express themselves.

seen as a shift from following rules to optimising outcomes for customers, who are perceived as expert decision-makers and, at the same time, budget holders. Workers are required to approach citizens as whole people and solve their problems comprehensively, thus providing so-called "tailor-made service delivery". In particular, they should use "new governance mechanisms" such as client profiling, performance indicators, so-called "game-theoretical incentives" or "institutionalised discretion" (Rice, 2017)[5]. At the same time, the public is paying increased attention to managers through social media (Needham, 2020; Bennett, 2023).

The above facts indicate the complexity of public policy implementation, which is challenging to grasp analytically and to investigate adequately. For this reason, the "too many variables problem" (Goggin et al., 1990), which arises when there are too many cases and too many variables, is often noted. At the same time, the "problem of the relationship between the resulting policy and the policy formed and implemented" is often noted, which concerns the difficulties of choosing appropriate methods to analyse the implementation of public policy (Hill & Hupe, 2009). These facts lead to the conclusion that a "unified implementation theory" or a more complex "general explanatory model" has not yet been successfully created, but only partial analytical "frameworks" or "models".

In this work, we aim to partially address this problem by asking: ***"What key factors and how do they influence the ways in which public policy is formed and provided by line workers in the environment of local implementing organisations and thus its resulting form, which affects regional and social development?" For these purposes, we have developed an analytical tool called the "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers"***. It allows us to understand the possible causes and, at the same time, the consequences of line workers' actions when providing public policy to various groups of citizens. Its potential lies mainly in the ability to identify specific types of causal factors, evaluate the degree of their influence and subsequently consider the possibilities and, if necessary, specific ways to influence them and thus influence the way in which public policy is provided and its resulting form and, if required, the impacts and

[5] Rice (2017) found, through an explanatory vignette study of employment service workers in Denmark and the Netherlands, that "institutionalised discretion" increases the innovation of employment services, supports their holistic delivery by line workers (especially towards vulnerable client groups), and increases the focus of service allocation capacities between vulnerable and work-ready clients.

effects on regional and social development in a specific location. The universal nature of this model enables its use to understand the implementation of individual public and social policies and the public services they provide, delivered by various types of line workers who interact with diverse citizens. We used this model to analyse the implementation of the active labour market policy, also known as the "welfare-to-work" policy, in two selected regions of the Czech Republic.

The presented habilitation thesis is structured into six chapters: the theoretical part (chapters 1-3), the methodological part (chapter 4), the analytical part (chapter 5), and the final part summarising the findings and their potential use (chapter 6). These chapters aim to introduce the reader gradually:

- ***The topic of "public policy implementation"*** and possible approaches to its investigation, and the benefits of research on public policy implementation from a line perspective to solving persistent problems that implementation scholars constantly face (Chapter 1);
- ***The concept of "street-level bureaucracy"*** and its integration into the existing literature on public policy implementation and the public policy process (Chapter 2);
- ***The possibilities of analytical insight and methodological research on public policy implementation at the line level*** through selected "frameworks" and "models" that allow us to understand the actions of street-level bureaucrats and their working environment, and thus the way they provide public services to different groups of citizens (Chapter 3);
- ***The "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers"*** created by us, an explanation of its construction and expected benefits (Chapter 4);
- ***The use of the model we created to analyse labour market policy in selected regions of the Czech Republic*** by presenting the results we obtained from this analysis (Chapter 5); and
- ***A summary of our key findings, comparing them with the previous findings of other authors and reflecting on the usability of the model we created*** for future research into the implementation of public policy or individual public and social policies at the line level (Chapter 6).

I decided to write this thesis for a simple reason: for most of my professional career, I have been researching the implementation of individual social policies, especially labour market policies, and to a lesser extent, policies for the care of preschool children, policies for the care of the elderly, and policies focused on homeless people. In my previous research, I have specifically addressed (i) the role of line bureaucrats (Horák, 2008a; Horák & Horáková, 2009a,b), their discretion (Horák, 2004a) (ii) and the goals of policies and public programs they achieve (Horák & Horáková, 2005; Horák, 2008b; Horák & Kulhavý, 2008) (iii) in providing specific public services to different groups of citizens (Horák, 2003, 2009, 2010; Sirovátka, Horák & Horáková, 2007) (iv) through specific tools (Horák, 2004b; Horák, Horáková & Sirovátka, 2007) (v) and in maintaining a certain level of quality of these services (Horák, 2004c). I also addressed (vi) the characteristics of implementing organisations in which line workers are employed (Horák, 2011; Špaček, Horák & Navrátil, 2022), (vii) the specifics of public administration, which these organisations are a part of, including the processes of implementation of social policies by organisations at the local level in the Czech Republic and abroad and the external circumstances that influence them (Horák, Horáková, Hora & Sirovátka, 2014; Horák, Horáková, Hora & Greve, 2014; Horák & Horáková, 2017; Horák, Horáková, Seeberg & Jessen, 2017; Horák, 2019) and (viii) at the same time their organisational resilience, especially as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Horák & Špaček, 2025; Indra, Horáková & Horák, 2025; Špaček & Horák, 2025; Horák, Špaček & Špalková, 2026). Finally, my focus was also on (ix) ways of examining the implementation of social policies at the local level through the concept of governance (Horák, 2012, 2018) and (x) the impact of policies on their end users (Horák, 2014; Horák, Zelenková, Kubalčíková, Hašová & Škorpíková, 2021; Baláž, Horák & Kubalčíková, 2022).

I. THEORETICAL PART

Chapter 1

IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC POLICY, APPROACHES TO ITS RESEARCH, AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH FOCUSED ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC AND SOCIAL POLICIES AT THE STREET LEVEL

In this section of the work, we address three related topics that align with the chapter title and correspond to the individual subchapters. First, we address policy implementation and possible approaches to its research (subchapter 1.1). We pay specific attention here to policy-makers and implementers as key actors in the political process and policy implementation, and then to the beginnings of the study of policy implementation and the development of individual approaches up to the present. Subsequently, we address the current theoretical approaches and topics that policy implementation research at the line level focuses on and the significance and possible benefits of this type of research for current knowledge and its practical use (subchapter 1.2). In the last subchapter, we address specific problems that implementation studies have not yet successfully addressed and, at the same time, consider how line-level research can mitigate them (subchapter 1.3).

The findings presented in the individual subchapters will allow us to answer the following questions:

- ***"What is public policy implementation about and what are the approaches to its study?"***
- ***"What does research into public policy implementation at the line level involve and what are its potential benefits?"***
- ***"What are the ongoing challenges facing implementation studies, and how can research/the perspective of line bureaucracy contribute to them?"***

1.1 Implementation of Public Policy and Existing Approaches to Its Research

1.1.1 Policy Makers and Implementers as Actors in the Political Process and Policy Implementation

As Hill and Hupe (2002) state, when we look at the public policy process, we can distinguish two worlds that differ in their responses and allow us to answer the question *"In what kinds of circumstances do policy implementers as well as policy formers do their work? And what is the relationship between the work of both?"* (p. 161).

At the very end of the line between policy intentions and policy outcomes, *"policy implementers"* work "downstairs". They are line bureaucrats, such as police officers, teachers, social workers, and other public officials, who interact with citizens in an often asymmetrical manner. These workers are significantly influenced by both official policy documents formulated and decided at the top, which are usually considered less clear and directive, and by the implementing organisation in which they are employed. This allows them to make direct contact with individual citizens in the name of the "general interest," using a variety of professional knowledge and skills that often differ.

At the other end of the line between policy outputs and policy intentions are the "policy-makers" in the ministries above who are involved in the formation of official policy documents. These are the result of compromises and ideological or party-political struggles that occur in the initial "phase" of the policy cycle, namely, agenda-setting, a rational response to a particular political or social problem. These actors do not always fully understand why the rules and regulations they have set out in laws and other official documents are sometimes not implemented as intended. For this reason, they often blame the "policy implementers" as they tend to see the objectives of the relevant policy and the means provided to achieve them as clearly stated.

Between the two worlds mentioned above, a "transformation process" (Van der Veen, 1990) unfolds, embedded in a series of vertical and horizontal relationships among diverse organisations. These include, on the one hand, organisations responsible for implementing the relevant policy, and, on the other, organisations involved in its formulation. Also, in the political sphere, there are horizontal links among political parties and other social organisations, as well as among departments, units within a department, and so on. At the vertical level, there is a general system of intergovernmental relations within which public

policies are formulated and implemented within a given state (Hill & Hupe, 2002: 163). The key focus of our work is the transformation process that occurs during policy implementation by line-level "policy implementers." Here, we consider "policy implementation" to be a key "phase", or the policy "process" during which government programs or policies are implemented (cf. DeLeon & DeLeon, 2002; Hill & Hupe, 2002, 2009, 2014, 2022; O'Toole, 2000) and thus put into practice (Tosun & Treib, 2018).

Since many factors influence this process, the resulting form of the public services provided is not entirely predictable. Each of the worlds mentioned above has its own specific logic. At the same time, several factors and dimensions influence the implementation of a particular public policy in practice. Moreover, this is influenced by the "institutional environment" of the given state, formed by political, legal and public institutions, as well as the "policy styles" and "regulation styles" of the given state, which can also be different[6] (Hupe, 2019a) (more on contextual factors influencing implementation is discussed in Chapter 3, subchapter 3.1).

1.1.2 The Origins of the Study of Policy Implementation and Existing Approaches to Its Research

Authors began to address implementation in the early 1930s, with numerous books, articles, and dissertations published in the 1940s and especially in the mid-1950s (see Saetren 2005). Policy implementation research itself came to the forefront of scholarly interest, especially in the 1970s, and was further developed in the 1980s and 1990s under the headings of ***the first, second, and third generations of implementation studies*** (Goggin, 1986; Lester et al., 1987; Goggin et al., 1990; Hill & Hupe, 2014, 2021). Policy implementation became a focus of scholarly interest in response to governments' concerns about the reduced effectiveness of public policies (O' Toole, 2000; Barrett, 2004), in an effort to identify possible reasons for the disproportions between policy intentions and policy outcomes. According to Hill and Hupe (2002, 2009, 2014, 2021), these three streams of studies have responded to changes in public administration practices and the

[6] For example, activist interventionism and rigid application of rules in the United States of America, legalistic interventionism and intensive business relations between government and corporations in Germany, activist interventionism, inflexible application of rules, and informal and more paternalistic relations between government and corporations in France.

implementation of public policies in developed countries, which have gradually occurred since the end of World War II. These are often referred to as the transition from the "era of interventionism"[7] in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s to the "era of market and corporate governance" in the 1980s and 1990s, and then to the "era of neo-interventionism" from the 1990s onward. At the same time, according to the same authors, these periods correspond to the development of the study and research of public administration, when there was a transition from "public administration"[8] in the 1970s through "public policy and management"[9] in the 1980s to "governance"[10] in the 1990s when the "governance paradigm" first appeared (for more details, see Hill & Hupe, 2009:106-112).

The first generation of implementation studies responded to Erwin Hargrove's (1975) study of the political process, in which he wrote about the "missing link," and to Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky's (1973) highly influential book Implementation. In their study of the implementation of a federal employment program in Oakland, California, these authors sought to uncover the "black box" of administrative processes that lie between the "policy formation" carried out by government actors at the centre and the "policy outcomes" delivered to citizens by line workers. They found that in practice, there is a departure from the intentions of central program makers formulated "on paper" (Hupe & Hill, 2019).

According to Nilsen et al. (2013), implementation studies of this generation are characterised by being qualitative, exploratory, atheoretical, single-case focused, and viewing implementation as part of a policy cycle divided into several phases. These are

[7] The "Era of Interventionism" was a period of great expectations and interventionism that lasted from the 1950s to the 1970s, with the beginning in the 1930s. It was associated with Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies of the early 1930s aimed at promoting the social welfare of citizens and responding to the consequences of the Great Depression, with investments by Western countries in the reconstruction of war-damaged infrastructure resulting from the Marshall Plan, with the introduction of the Program Planning Budgeting System in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and with the training of civil servants in the United Kingdom (for more details, see Hill & Hupe, 2009, pp. 82-85).

[8] Public policy implementation was associated with a "problem-solving paradigm" and a "policy-implementation paradigm" focused on large-scale policy programs of an interventionist central government (for more details, see Hill & Hupe, 2009, pp. 106-107).

[9] The previous paradigm was replaced by the "New Public Management paradigm" and later supplemented in the Thatcher-Reagan era by the "embedded market paradigm" (for more details, see Hill & Hupe, 2009: 107-108).

[10] As a result of the so-called relativisation of the traditional relevance of central political institutions and the new dependence of government on other social actors who began to influence policy-making, a "governance paradigm" emerged (for more details, see Hill & Hupe, 2009, pp. 108-109).

typically “agenda setting,” “policy formulation,” “policy legitimation,” “policy implementation,” and “policy evaluation.” Implementation failure is described from a “top-down” perspective to identify factors that could explain the implementation gap from the perspective of central government policy-makers. In particular, unclear or flawed policies, insufficient resources, poor compliance by implementers, opposition within the political community, and adverse socioeconomic conditions are cited (Schofield, 2001). This generation of policy implementation research has been criticised in particular for focusing too much on implementation failure (Saetren, 2024).

Since the early 1980s, ***a second generation of implementation studies*** has emerged, aiming to advance implementation theory. Their focus has been on a more detailed analysis of variables that could explain the impact of the implementation process through newly developed analytical “models” and analytical-theoretical “frameworks” (e.g., Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983, 1989; Moulin et al., 2020). These analytical tools have been accompanied by a debate between the representatives of the so-called “top-down” and “bottom-up” perspectives, which represent the “normative” versus the “descriptive” perspective (Nilsen et al., 2013), and which has concerned normative, methodological, and theoretical issues (Saetren, 2005).

- ***The “top-down” view/perspective*** is specifically based on the thesis of “incongruent implementation” (Hupe, 2011), i.e., the discrepancy between the outputs of implemented policies and intentions of their makers. Representatives of this approach specifically assume (i) a “chronological order” of activities when intentions precede actions, (ii) a “linear causality” of the implementation process when goals determine instruments and instruments determine outcomes, and (iii) a “hierarchy” when policy formation is more important than policy implementation (Hupe & Hill, 2019). Policy implementation is viewed as following instructions created by actors “above” and its failure is explained as a consequence of their insufficient compliance by policy implementers “below” (see Hupe, 2018). Some top-down research in this context has attempted to create generalizable policy advice such as making policy objectives clear and consistent (van Meter & van Horn, 1975), minimizing the number of actors (Pressman & Wildavski, 1973), limiting the scope of necessary changes (Mazmanian &

Sabatier, 1983), and entrusting responsibility for implementation to an agency sympathetic to the policy objectives (Sabatier, 1986).

- In ***the bottom-up view/perspective***, on the other hand, the focus is not on following instructions but on practice implemented at the line level, i.e., in Hupe and Hill's (2019) words, "on the ground floor of government". The aim of these authors (especially Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Barrett & Fudge, 1981; Hjern, 1982)[11] is to uncover the dynamics of what occurs in line organisations responsible for implementing policy in situations characterised by multiple demands and limited resources. Many of these authors have long drawn attention to the fact that all parts of the policy process are characterised by discretion as a degree of autonomy for independent judgment (e.g., Winter, 2012; May, 2015; Evans & Hupe, 2020; Hill & Varone, 2021; Weible, 2023 - for more details see Chapter 2, subchapter 2.1.2). Researchers using this perspective have logically criticized scholars who advocate a "top-down" perspective because they considered implementation to be a purely administrative process and did not take into account the role of frontline workers who actually shape policy in the complex process of translating political intentions into resulting action (O'Toole, 2004) and can therefore be considered as real "policy-makers" (Lipsky, 1980, 2010). "Bottom-up" researchers have sought to understand the interactions among actors and have placed great emphasis on the importance of implementation structures or networks formed by implementing organisations at the local level (e.g., Hanf & Scharpf, 1978; Hjern, 1982; Hull & Hjern, 1987). They have therefore focused more on the nature of the social problems the policy was supposed to solve than on its goals, set by its makers "at the top". They placed great emphasis on studying the factors that hindered the achievement of the set goals (Nilsen et al., 2013). The primary recommendation of this

[11] Among the prominent representatives of the "bottom-up" approach are: (i) Michael Lipsky (1980; 2010), who focused on policy-making at the street level carried out by line employees of organisations providing public policies, so-called street-level bureaucrats, whom he considers to be the key actors in policy implementation, (ii) Benny Hjern (1972), who examined the activities of mutually cooperating actors from different local organisations, which represent "implementation structures", and (iii) Susan Barrett and Colin Fudge (1981), who draw attention to the dynamic connection between policy and action (since many activities are the result of compromises between people from different parts of individual organisations or related organisations) and at the same time to the inseparability of policy implementation from its creation (because policy implementation inevitably involves its interpretation, modification, or subversion).

approach's representatives was the use of a flexible strategy that would allow adaptation to local difficulties and contextual factors (Matland, 1995).

"Top-down" proponents have criticised the "bottom-up" approach, particularly for placing too much emphasis on the autonomy of line workers and for lacking an explicit theory capable of explaining the influences on the policy implementation process and how policy changes occur (Schofield, 2001). Both top-down and bottom-up perspectives have been valuable, as they have focused on the roles of implementation systems at both levels. However, many authors of one approach have ignored the part of reality that the other approach explains (Winter, 2006).

The third generation of policy implementation research emerged in the second half of the 1980s. Its representatives sought to integrate the two approaches mentioned above to better understand policy implementation, developing synthesised "models" and "frameworks". For this reason, they are often referred to as "synthetisers"[12] (Hill & Hupe, 2009, 2014, 2022). Examples of these analytical tools are the "Integrated Implementation

[12] There are many representatives of the mixed approach to the study of policy implementation. According to Hill and Hupe (2009), the most important authors include: (i) Richard Elmore (1978), who recommends examining complicated events through various theoretical (organisational) models and at the same time examining the individual actions of actors at the street level to identify ways of responding to specific problems; (ii) Fritz Scharpf (1978), who recommends examining the nature of networks (involving actors with different interests, goals and strategies who participate in the creation and implementation of policy), their dependence on resources and exchange that facilitate this process; (iii) Paul Sabatier (1986), who proposed the Advocacy Coalitions Framework to understand policy changes due to the focus on various public and private actors and the influence of socio-economic conditions and legal instruments; (iv) Jan-Erik Lane (1987), who views the implementation process as a combination of the responsibilities of implementing actors who seek to achieve policy, trust in policy-makers, and implementing actors; (v) Malcolm Goggin, Ann Bowman, James Lester, and Laurence O'Toole, Jr. (1990), who developed a "communication model" for analysing implementation, emphasizing what influences the acceptance or rejection of messages between layers of government; (vi) Laurence O'Toole, Jr. (1990), who used a model of inter-organisational processes and network management; (vii) Dennis Palumbo and Donald Calista (1990), who argue that implementation is a legitimate part of policymaking because implementers are part of every phase of the policy cycle, in which new and detailed negotiations with multiple actors about policy language, legislative intent, or implementation negotiations occur; (viii) Robert Stoker (1991), who analysed the consequences of the influence of the actions of actors from different levels of government on governance in federal systems of government and where "unwilling partners" are forced to cooperate to achieve common goals through "centralised", "shared" or "dispersed" distribution of public power in different constitutional or institutional contexts; (ix) Richard Matland (1995), who identified different modes of implementation (administrative, experimental, political, symbolic) in different contexts according to the characteristics of the policy, which are characterized by a combination of low or high ambiguity and high or low conflict; (x) Walter Kickert, Erik-Hans Klijn and Joop Koppenjan (1997), who analysed political networks formed by a large number of interdependent and interacting actors who shape policies and the management of these networks through actors who ensure the coordination of the actors in the networks; and (xi) Bo Rothstein (1998), who argues that successful policy implementation is often a matter of organizing the implementation process to accommodate the need for flexibility and uncertainty that occurs in both political theory and practice, and who identifies six ideal typical models for legitimizing political processes.

Model" (Winter, 1990), the "Communication Model of Inter-governmental Policy Implementation" (Goggin et al., 1990), and the "Ambiguity-Conflict Model of Policy Implementation" (Matland, 1995). Emphasis was placed on rigorous research methodology, particularly longitudinal studies and multiple-case comparative studies, to increase the number of observations (for more details, see Nilsen et al., 2013).

The representatives of this approach faced difficulties, particularly in distinguishing between policy formation and implementation in political systems characterised by separate political-administrative layers, as in federalism and intergovernmental relations. These began to arise as a result of the need for governments to solve more effectively and efficiently the then very complex and difficult-to-solve problems referred to in the literature as "wicked problems" or "wicked issues" (for more details, see e.g., Lönngren & van Poeck, 2021; Head, 2023; Bannink, Sancino & Sorrentino, 2024). For this reason, *governance* became the centre of interest of these and many other authors, in whose perspective the implementation process includes complex networks spread horizontally and vertically between state and non-state organisations that have recently begun to participate in the formation and implementation of public policies (Hill & Hupe, 2009, 2014, 2022; Ansell & Torfing, 2022; Klijn, Koppenjan, Spekkink & Warsen, 2025). Practical solutions to various problems are thus ensured through "robust governance" as evidenced by many studies (e.g., Ansell, Sørensen & Torfing, 2023; Ansell, Sørensen, Torfing & Trondal, 2024, 2025; Torfing et al., 2025).

The shift in scholarly interest from examining "implementation" to "governance" has been one of the reasons why some scholars argued that the overall volume of publications on policy implementation has stagnated or fallen dramatically since the third generation of implementation studies because this topic has become "outdated" (Hill & Hupe, 2002; cf. Barrett, 2004; DeLeon & DeLeon, 2002; Hill & Hupe, 2009; O'Toole 2000, 2004; Schofield, 2001; Schofield & Sausman, 2004; Winter, 2012; Saetren, 2014; Farazmand, 2023; Miller, 2024). However, a detailed analysis of the literature in available databases, including book chapters, articles, and dissertations, indicates that, in contrast, the volume of publications increased exponentially from the 1990s to the early 2000s (see Saetren, 2005). A large number of publications were not in the core or related fields of political science and its subfields, such as public administration and public policy, as had been the case until then,

but rather in non-core fields focused on various policy areas, especially education, health, the environment, society, and economics. In this context, Saetren (2005, pp. 572-3) lists following five possible reasons for the low interest of political scientists including experts in public administration and public policy in the study of policy implementation: (i) the frustration of many scholars with the aforementioned long-standing debate between two competing analytical paradigms "top-down" and "bottom-up", (ii) political scientists began to replace the terms "government" and "implementation" with "governance" and "political networks", (iii) many early implementation studies tended to fail, pursued ideological purposes and unwittingly contributed to the delegitimization of the study of implementation, (iv) experts have begun to express doubts about the extent to which the inherently complex political process can be simplistically divided into separate phases, and (v) few research topics - including policy implementation - have been the focus of political scientists' attention for a long time.

Nilsen et al. (2013) consider the second reason mentioned above as a key one, when the topics of "governance" and "political networks" became the focus of political scientists' interest in exploring the effects of institutional and inter-organisational relationships (for more details, see Saetren, 2005; Hill & Hupe, 2021). This was a natural consequence of the changes in relations between the state and society in many industrialised countries, from unilateral, hierarchical relations to more reciprocal, horizontal ones. Although the term implementation became less popular, scholars continued to focus on the same factors as earlier implementation studies, such as the relationship between policy-making and its effects across different levels of government.

However, the shift from "government" to "governance" and from "implementation" to "political networks" has significantly influenced not only the topics under study but also the attitudes and strategies of public policy practitioners and academics regarding how to research new topics. The growing complexity of public policy and the intertwining of processes influencing policy-making and its implementation have led most scholars to move away from the traditional stages heuristic perspective that views politics as a series of distinct phases, i.e., the so-called "phase model" or "policy cycle model"[13] (see DeLeon

[13] This model allows for viewing policy as a series of successive stages or phases referred to as agenda setting, policy making consisting of policy formulation and decision-making, implementation, and evaluation.

1999 for more details). Its use has been limited in contemporary research, which focuses primarily on governance (Sabatier, 2007). Instead, alternative "frameworks" have been developed as functional equivalents of the stages heuristic, characterised by complexity and empirical openness, while retaining a meta-theoretical character (Hill & Hupe, 2009, p. 123). Among the most important of them are the "logic of governance" (Lynn, Heinrich & Hill, 1981), the "Institutional Analysis and Development Framework" (Kiser & Ostrom, 1982), or the "Multiple Governance Framework" (Hill & Hupe, 2006, 2009) (for more details, see Chapter 3, subchapter 3.2.1).

Policy implementation studies can currently be found at the intersection of public administration, organisational theory, public management research, and political science (for more details, see, e.g., Nilsen et al., 2013; Saetren, 2014; Hill & Hupe, 2021; Christensen & Lægreid, 2025a). Implementation research has become multidisciplinary and diverse: his interest is focused on the problems of individual states and, in recent years, on the policies of the European Union implemented in individual member states. Several themes can be identified in current implementation studies, which include, in addition to the aforementioned "governance" and "networks", in particular "synthesis of top-down and bottom-up approaches", "linking between policy-making and implementation", "political-administrative layers" in the policy process and "management of the performance of individual organisations" and "inter-organisational relationships" (for more details, see Hill and Hupe, 2021: 61-68).

A literature review of implementation studies conducted by Hill and Hupe (2002: 137) over two decades ago and continuing to the present day has revealed the following key findings that call for future implementation research: (i) "the need for recognition of the complexity of the output/outcome relationship in policy implementation", (ii) "the need to give attention to the nature of the relationship between policy formers and policy implementers when the former frame mandates", (iii) "the importance of the 'street level' in the implementation process, something that cannot simply be dissolved into a series of propositions about ways to impose stronger control", (iv) "the continuing importance of inter-organisational relationships for implementation", (v) "the importance of co-production involving clients, customers and regulates, often even where they are comparatively powerless", and (vi) "the need to acknowledge that many variables occur

and interact in the policy implementation process, and therefore it is appropriate to grasp this process as a whole", as in many cases it may be inappropriate to separate implementation from the policy-making process (cf. Hill & Hupe, 2009, 2014, 2022; Hupe, 2019d).

The key problem of all the above-mentioned approaches to the study of implementation is that they are applied separately. This fact means that a unified "grand implementation theory" that would bridge these approaches has not yet been developed (Saetren & Hupe, 2018). The expected linear development of policy implementation research that would lead to the emergence of a unified theory does not exist. As Hupe and Hill (2019) state, instead, there are recurring and cyclical elements in implementation theories, where *"between the thesis and the synthesis, the anti-thesis of bottom-up approaches has been sustained and is very much alive"* (p. 17).

1.2 Research on Public Policy Implementation at the Street Level – Topics Studied and Their Benefits

As noted in the previous chapter, representatives of the "bottom-up" approach emphasise the crucial role of line actors. The reason is that they shape the final form of policy, are far removed from the supervision of political "principals", and regard implementation as a mobilisation of diverse stakeholders' energy. This enables them to make reasonable decisions when solving a variety of problems in a complex, context-specific, and dynamic policy environment, thereby placing primary emphasis on innovation, collaboration, and creativity.

The founder of this perspective is the American political scientist Michael Lipsky, who, in his concept/theory of "street-level bureaucracy", focused on policy-making at the line level. This occurs through the practices of line employees in state organisations, so-called "street-level bureaucrats," within government bureaucracies. According to Lipsky, these workers are key actors in policy implementation and can therefore be considered real policy-makers. They are forced to implement their decisions under often unbearable pressure, due to insufficient financial, personnel, and technological resources, combined with the uncertain effectiveness of the methods they use and the unpredictability of the clients they serve, who often use their services involuntarily. In Lipsky's words, „*they spend*

their work lives in the corrupted worlds of services" and see themselves as cogs in the system, oppressed by the bureaucracy in which they work (Lipsky 1980/2010) (we discuss this concept/theory in detail in Chapter 2).

In the following two subchapters, we first discuss existing theoretical approaches and topics explored at the street level (subchapter 1.2.1), and then the reasons for, and potential benefits of, adopting a line perspective for researching and understanding policy implementation (subchapter 1.2.2).

1.2.1 Previous Theoretical Approaches and Topics Investigated at the Street Level

Since Lipsky (1980/2010) first used the term "street-level bureaucracy", there has been significant progress in identifying specific aspects of the work at the line level of state organisations/government bureaucracies that influence the way policy is implemented and its final form (for more details, see Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2010; Brodkin, 2012; Meyers & Lehmann Nielsen, 2012; Gilson, 2015; Hupe, Hill & Buffat, 2015; Mettan, 2022; Gofen, Rønning & Sønderskov, 2025). In this context, Hupe (2019b, pp. 32-36) summarised the previous theoretical approaches of various authors that focus *on* ***identifying factors that explain what happens at the line-level of government bureaucracy in its environment – that is, the context that influences it*****.** He distinguished these approaches, which we present below, according to what is the "subject" of their interest, what is their "scope", and how "generalizable" they are.

Subject of Interest of Previous Studies

In Lipsky's (1980/2010) book, the concepts of "discretion" and "coping strategies" play a key role, and their conceptualisation has since been developed extensively. For example, "discretion" began to be referred to as "controlled freedom" and examined from various disciplinary perspectives (e.g., Evans & Hupe, 2020; Choi, Park & Lee, 2025; for more details, see chapter 2, subchapter 2.1.2). Alternatively, it has been generally associated with "coping" as a coping behaviour[14] (Baviskar & Winter, 2017; Lotta et al., 2024), which has

[14] Although Lipsky considered "coping strategies" to be a key element of his theoretical approach, recently some scholars have used the term to refer to an umbrella concept that shows what happens overall at the street level (e.g., Brodkin, 1997; Gofen, 2014; Møller, 2016). "Coping" in public service delivery can be defined

begun to be linked, for example, to the psychological concept of "policy alienation", which is related to the "willingness" of public professionals to implement public policies (Tummers, Bekkers & Steijn, 2012; Tummers, 2013; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014; Tummers et al., 2015; Tummers, 2017; Usman, Ali, Mughal & Agyemang-Mintah, 2021; Levesque & Benoit, 2025, see Chapter 2, subchapter 2.1.3). Other authors have begun to examine the "interaction styles" of line workers (May & Winter, 2009; van Parys & Struyven, 2018; Doerflinger, 2022; Chang, 2025). In contrast, relatively little attention has been paid to the effects of contracting processes (Smith & Lipsky, 1993), occupational standards, norms, and socialisation (Oberfield, 2014), or the influence of broader social and cultural factors (Jewell, 2007). Other authors have addressed the "uncertainty" of frontline workers' experiences (Raaphorst, 2017), the "dispositions" of workers as "moral agents" to deal with often "impossible situations" (Zacka, 2017), or the "strategies to fulfil specific public tasks" (Hupe & Buffat, 2014; Hansen et al., 2024).

Scope of Studies to Date

Since the first publication of Lipsky's book, interest in the type of street-level bureaucrats studied has expanded from the traditional types represented by teachers, police officers, and social workers to include other types of bureaucrats such as court clerks (Yngvesson, 1988), tax auditors (Kinsey & Stalans, 1999), emergency call operators, attorneys, and correctional officers (Guy, Newman, & Mastracci, 2008), housing officials (Alden, 2015), health care workers (Hupe, Hill & Buffat, 2015a), law enforcement inspectors (Winter & May, 2015), and building inspectors (May & Wood, 2003). As mentioned in the previous subchapter, the number of empirical studies focusing on street-level bureaucracy has remained high for a long time and, in the case of monographs and edited books, has even been growing in recent years (e.g., Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, 2022; Riccucci, 2005; Jewell, 2007; Dubois, 2010; Evans, 2010; Oberfield, 2014; Raaphorst, 2017; Zacka, 2017; Buffat, Hill & Hupe, 2015; Hupe, 2019; Evans & Hupe, 2020; Hupe, 2022; Lipsky, 2023; Peeters, Lotta & Nieto-Morales, 2024; Cohen, Davidovitz, Lotta & Lazebnik, 2025).

in this context as "behavioural efforts frontline workers employ when interacting with clients, in order to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts they face on an everyday basis" (Tummers, Bekkers, Vink & Musheno, 2015, p. 1100).

Generalizability of the Findings to Date

Generalisation of findings requires that existing studies pay as much attention as possible to the influence of the diverse contexts in which line bureaucrats implement policy. While in the first edition Lipsky (1980) focused exclusively on the "common elements" of occupations of line bureaucrats, in the new edition from 2010, he draws attention to the "evolving policy environment", but inter-organisational settings remain in the background. He also does not pay attention to the dimensions of power and the resulting asymmetries, nor to the position of line bureaucrats in the policy process as a whole (Hupe, 2019b, p. 34). On the other hand, many researchers have compensated for Lipsky's omission in recent decades by paying attention to the relationships between what happens at the line level, which factors influence them, and what the effects of these activities are (for more details, see Hupe and Hill 2019) (we will discuss the topic of line level activities in detail in Chapter 2, and the influencing factors in Chapter 3). According to Hupe (2019b), the generalizability of the acquired knowledge is crucial. However, it requires the creation of a "general explanatory model" which would include various factors and actors from different public-administrative layers. However, a unified, generally applicable implementation theory has not yet been developed, as existing multilevel approaches are merely "theories" of line bureaucracy that include only selected clusters of factors.[15]

Hupe (2019b) also points out that knowledge of street-level bureaucracy acquired over the past decades has ***three major drivers that are fundamental to understanding what occurs at the line level of government bureaucracy***. Specifically, these are the following topics and the questions that have not yet been answered: (i) the reach of hierarchy, which is the focus of the "top-down" view of implementation, with the unanswered question "How, and in what contexts, does goal clarity matter?", (ii) the impact of similar work circumstances in a given organisational setting, which is the focus of the "bottom-up" view of implementation with the unanswered question "How, and to what extent, do, respectively, structure and agency matter?", and (iii) difference individual actors make, which are the focus of authors focusing on the psychological traits of bureaucrats with the

[15] This is evidenced by Hupe's (2019b) analysis of articles published between 1990 and 2010 in leading global journals focused on public administration, more specifically, the Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, Public Administration Review, and Public Administration. It showed that out of 68 articles, only 8 articles presented multilevel approaches that included diverse sets of variables.

unanswered question "How do individuals matter?" (for more details see Hupe, 2019b, pp. 36-39). The same author has conducted a careful analysis of the existing research on street-level bureaucracy, identifying several key general observations and proposing several recommendations in the form of lessons that mainly address theoretical and methodological issues (see Figures 1.1a-1.1d in the Appendix to this work).

According to Brodkin (2015), ***street-level bureaucracy research is an investigation of the "inside story" in the often-hidden recesses of organisations*** that deliver public policy in an attempt to discover what "factors" systematically shape those line practices and ultimately impact policy and, more broadly, the "processes" of their formation within politics. Brodkin also argues that the authors of previous line bureaucracy research have asked themselves numerous theoretical and empirical questions related to (i) the dynamics between organisational structures and discretionary behaviour of line bureaucrats, (ii) the influence of new managerial and governance arrangements on organisational practices, and (iii) the role of street-level organisations in the broader politics of the welfare state. In addition to state bureaucratic organisations, in recent years there has also been (iv) research into other types of line organisations (non-state profit, non-profit or mixed), which are newly significantly involved in the performance of public tasks and which operate in different structural arrangements (contracting, free-for-services, vouchers, philanthropic or government grants) (for more details see Brodkin, 2013)[16].

According to Brodkin (2015), three key areas of research can be distinguished in current studies of line bureaucracy that overlap with each other and are discussed below: "policy-focused studies", "management and governance studies", and "socio-political and welfare state studies".

Policy-focused studies offer theoretically informed strategies for examining how public policies work in practice and for analysing how policies "on paper" are implemented. In fact, they test, refine, and extend Lipsky's theoretical template by examining the factors that shape line practices and the types of adaptations made under specific working

[16] In the United States, the origins of street-level research were linked to the development of public policy studies, and especially policy implementation. Since the 1960s, the transforming federal government had been trying to combat poverty and urban unrest under the names of the "War on Poverty" and "the Great Society", but it lacked sufficient authority to introduce new policies, as it was dependent on other government organisations to implement them.

conditions. These studies demonstrate that line workers employ a wide range of strategies. However, the limited availability of various types of resources forces workers to develop diverse coping mechanisms that rationalise and, indirectly but significantly, influence how policy is delivered. Problematic practices, such as blaming clients for their situation, may ultimately be dysfunctional due to low worker responsiveness or limited effectiveness (e.g., Purtle et al., 2023; Laffin et al., 2024).

Management and governance studies, often grounded in the principles of New Public Management, examine the impacts of managerial and governmental reforms at the line level, which, in turn, lead to changes in the organisational environment of implementing organisations. The newly provided services usually follow market principles and, in addition to state organisations, are delivered by non-state, non-profit or for-profit organisations through public-private agreements. In these studies, line organisations are reconceptualised as “adaptive organisations”. Their focus is on the “interaction” between street-level discretion and changes in the managerial environment (Afshar & Shah, 2025). In addition to line bureaucrats, these studies examine a broader field of line organisations involved in policy delivery, where changes influence the discretion of line workers and the resulting policy outcomes in organisational forms and managerial strategies. The subject of interest of these studies is not only the “efficiency” or “control” of line workers, but also their “performance” and “accountability”. One area of research is “contracting” as a method of providing services by non-state actors. It examines, for example, whether the private or public form of service provision is better, or what the scope of discretion is for employees of state and non-state organisations (e.g., Considine, 2000; Considine & Lewis, 2012; Considine & O'Sullivan, 2015; Considine et al., 2020; Mok et al., 2021; Anguelov & Brunjes, 2023; Carter et al., 2025). Another area of research is the response to “management-by-performance measurement”, which, compared to other management strategies, has seen the most significant shift in recent decades, especially in the United States of America, where this method is ubiquitous. In this case, the mechanisms of performance measurement penetration into line practices are examined, specifically the measurable dimensions of work and the unmeasurable aspects of line workers'

performance (e.g., Lindhorst & Padgett, 2005; Jewell, 2007; Brodkin 2011a, 2013, 2016; Soss, Fording & Schram, 2011; Chen et al., 2018; Lotta & Considine, 2025)[17].

Socio-political and welfare state studies examine the political functions of line organisations as mediators of socio-legal status and as actors in the politics of the welfare state. Line bureaucrats are viewed in these studies as actors shaping public policy, as they form the operational core of the welfare state. They are not simply "officers" but, by operating at the intersection of individuals and the state, they mediate not only the policy-making process but also "broader social and political dynamics" (Brodkin, 2013). According to Brodkin (2015), several lines of research can be identified in this type of studies, which differ in their focus on different topics, which are: (i) the distributive "patterns of informal street-level practices" by examining how these practices affect the access to services and benefits for different citizens (e.g., Riccucci, 2005; Wilkins & Williams, 2008; Wilkins & Wenger, 2015; Brodkin & Majmundar, 2010; Pfaff et al., 2018; Ratzman, 2021; Vogel, Dahlweg & Hattke, 2025)[18], (ii) to what extent and with what results can "the interrelationship and process of action" between political actors at the government level and at the level of implementing line organisations penetrate line practices (e.g., Keiser, 1999, 2001; Meyers & Vorsanger, 2007; May & Winter, 2009; Davidovitz & Cohen, 2021; Stauffer & Hadorn, 2024), (iii) how line organisations "mediate social status and identities" by examining how race and gender shape line interactions and how social status is negotiated in the course of these interactions (e.g., Rosenthal & Pecci, 2006; Watkins-Hayes, 2011; Park, 2022; Hansen, 2025), (iv) examining line exchanges in the process of "construction and contestation of class status" for example by poor and marginalized citizens in exercising their right to assistance from the state (e.g., Dubois, 2010; Lens, 2019; Groenevald & Meier, 2022), and (v) "the role of line organisations as the operational core of the state", which can act as "mediators of policy and at the same time as mediators of

[17] A large number of these studies show that the demand for managerial efficiency, together with the constant monitoring of performance metrics, is pressing on line practices in such a way that it is "squeezing the discretion" of line workers, thereby limiting the opportunities to respond to real client needs. According to Brodkin (2015), this means that the dilemmas identified by Lipsky have become even more intense in this area today.

[18] Research shows that line bureaucrats created disparities in service provision, to the point of excluding access for certain groups of people, especially those least equipped to overcome the obstacles of bureaucratic procedures and confusing or complex organisational processes, or even people from the non-majority population with different religious beliefs or migrants.

politics and processes" of welfare states transformation (Brodkin, 2013, 2021) which includes, for example, studies examining the real changes in the structures of policy provision and strategies of the New Public Management as a result of the influence of management strategies on the discretionary behaviour of line workers (Soss, Fording & Schram, 2011; Schram, 2012; van Berkel & Knies, 2016; van Berkel, de Vries & Knies, 2021; Klatt & Fairholm, 2023), or on their identities (Jacobsson, Wallinder & Seing, 2020; Spanò, Tomo & Parker, 2022; Tomo, 2023; Tomo & Mangia, 2025).

1.2.2 Reasons and Potential Benefits of Examining Public Policy Implementation at the Street Level

According to Hupe (2019a), it is essential to study street-level bureaucracy, both because of its direct connections to the political process and because it is *the area where "the state and citizen meet"* (Goodsell, 1981) *and public policies take their final form*. In fact, it is a space where "policy politics" occurs (Brodkin, 1990), and implementation is considered more than a mere administrative act. The reason is that line bureaucrats are required to address ambiguities, uncertainties, or conflicts that cannot be delegated. At the same time, they often work alone and are therefore hard to monitor (cf. Zacka, 2017).

The study of street-level bureaucracy is useful because it helps us understand how line bureaucrats behave in a given work environment and, ideally, ***uncover the motives for their actions that can lead to policy implementation failures.*** This topic has been discussed in detail by Tummers (2011). Through his "Policy Alienation Framework"[19], he found that public professionals often show resistance to the implementation of some policies, especially measures introduced within the framework of New Public Management, which requires the application of practices that pursue economic efficiency. Specifically, Tummers found that workers tend to resist in two situations: (i) when they experience "operational powerlessness," which consists of limited decision-making about the type, quantity, or quality of sanctions and rewards offered, and (ii) when they perceive "societal or client meaninglessness", when, in their opinion, the measures do not contribute to socially

[19] Political alienation, according to Tummers et al. (2009), is a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the political agenda implemented by public professionals who regularly interact directly with clients.

relevant goals in the first case or do not add value to their clients in the second case (cf. eg., Mwilongo, Kaamo, & Tumbo, 2025).

According to Hupe and Hill (2019), there are ***three key reasons why Lipsky focused on street-level bureaucracy in an attempt to discover what happens at the lowest level of government***: (i) "policy implementation" as part of the policy process is empirically as important as "policy formation", (ii) researchers will "understand what policy implementation means" only if they explicitly focus on the line level, and (iii) from the perspective of the superior authority (principal), "discretion" may be a matter of choice, while for line actors (agents) it is a necessary part of their actions called "inherent characteristic".

As indicated in the previous subchapter, the origins of research on line bureaucracy, which in fact represents the theme of "government-in-action" (Hupe & Hill, 2019), are connected to implementation. This has historically been examined from various perspectives and using different analytical methods and procedures. The contribution of examining policy implementation from a bottom-up perspective, through the concept of street-level bureaucracy, is undeniable. *It allows eliminating numerous shortcomings of the top-down approach, which*, according to Hupe and Hill (2019, pp. 18-22), *relate to the stereotypes, so-called "idées recues", listed below.*

- ***"The myth of rational problem-solving"***: the process of policy implementation as a series of successive phases often does not occur at all, and the identification of relationships between causes and effects and costs and benefits does not concern only the means/outcomes relationship, because it notes situations that are desirable, but does not explain real situations.
- ***"The control trap"***: the implicit adoption of a top-down perspective can lead to a confusion of the normative and the real/empirical. It can evaluate the real as an undesirable deviation from the normative. Through open observation, it is possible to determine what is actually happening and to distinguish it from judgments about the legitimacy of what is being implemented.
- ***"The appeal of reification"***: the reification of each separate phase of the policy process has its downsides, as exemplified by the situation where the top-down approach assumes at which phase of the policy process the activities associated with policy

making end and when its implementation begins, without these processes being realistically examined.

- ***"Presupposed practice"***: implementation studies that use a "top-down" perspective neglect the processes that occur during implementation, e.g., mapping the activities of the Conservative Party in the UK during the Margaret Thatcher government, which led to the transfer of a new ideology into real policies.
- ***"An empirical bias"***: it refers to the extent to which policy can be understood as an area that can be implemented as it is explicitly and unambiguously formulated (Hill & Varone, 2021). Policy can be seen as standards, goals, and resources. It represents a complex, simultaneously unambiguous input to the implementation process, can be characterised by ambiguity and conflict, and is essential to determine what implementers actually do ("what activities") and where they do it ("at what level").
- ***"The paradox of under-conceptualisation"***: it is the "too few cases/too many variables" problem (Goggin, 1986; O'Toole, 1986), which represents potential explanatory variables that are labelled mainly in general terms (Hupe & Hill, 2019). At the same time, they lack a theoretical structure (Matland, 1995) because the determinants of policy are not accounted for. Top-down perspectives do not account for the interaction between policy originators and implementers, and there is also the question of whether to use multifaceted qualitative research or quantitative hypothesis testing focused on a limited number of variables.

According to Hupe and Hill (2019: 24-26), policy implementation research from a line perspective is helpful in that it allows for the identification of the "empirical object" of research interest, the "scope" of research focus, and the "generalisation" of the results, in the contexts listed below.

The "empirical object of research". Since Lipsky's time, authors of the "bottom-up" approach have sought to determine "what actually happens when public policies are enacted" (Lipsky, 2010, p. 213). The focus is on (i) "public service organisations," sometimes called "street-level organisations" (e.g., Brodkin, 2011a; Spitzmueller, 2023; Domenig & Sager, 2024), (ii) the "interaction" of citizens with the line bureaucracies represented by these organisations, and (iii) "the search for the place of the individual in public services" (Lipsky 2010, p. xi), by which are meant "public workers" and "front-line workers,"

sometimes called “boundary spanners” (Williams, 2002), “public professionals” (Tummers et al., 2009), or “professionals in public service” (Hupe, 2010).

The “scope” of the research focus is on what types of bureaucratic organisations or line workers can be considered street-level bureaucrats. These can be defined as workers who (i) “have inherent discretion, (ii) function as policy co-makers, and (iii) show a certain craftsmanship in fulfilling their tasks” (Hupe, Hill & Buffat, 2015a, p. 16). According to some authors, research on line bureaucracies can be identified at the intersection of public administration, social welfare, criminal justice, and socio-legal studies (Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2010). Line workers can thus include, for example, court clerks, tax auditors, building inspectors, emergency call operators, and public guardians. These are workers who may differ, for example: (i) in the way they contact citizens, which may be a bulletin board, telephone, internet or social media (e.g., Bovens & Zouridis, 2002; Wenger & Wilkins, 2002), (ii) in the degree of “discretion-as-used” and the degree of authority to make their own judgments and decisions within the framework of “discretion-as-granted”, (iii) whether they are thoroughly professional or semi-professional workers (Etzioni, 1969), (d) in the type of organisation in which they work - e.g., a “craft organisation” such as a barracks or a “coping agency” such as a school (Wilson, 1989).

The “Generalisation” of the resulting findings lies in the fact that a certain degree of generalisation is possible in the case of a contextualised comparison of available information. These include both the identification of the original policy intentions and the interactions among diverse actors across layers and job positions in public administration, who differ in the nature and degree of discretion. It is necessary to pay attention not only to line bureaucrats but also to other actors who influence them, particularly managers who oversee their work and exercise discretion (Evans, 2011).

According to Brodkin (2015, pp. 39-42), the following four areas of practical benefits of street-level analysis can be identified:

- ***The possibility of a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of organisational behaviour***, which allows us to assess what line organisations need to create working conditions. This will reduce the likelihood of the emergence and overuse of problematic coping strategies.

- ***Providing sufficient information to consider whether or not to introduce, or how quickly, new public administration reforms*** of the New Public Management type, where incentives for line workers are replaced by control over their activities. An example is performance management, which can be a valuable tool for monitoring line workers' practices. However, its selectivity has both advantages and disadvantages because it encompasses both measurable and unmeasurable activities.
- ***Benefits for reflection on current practices by line workers as well as students who represent future practitioners,*** including, for example: (i) the opportunity to better understand how organisational conditions influence their activities, (ii) the realization that they have limited influence on what happens "at the top" of politics, (iii) the opportunity to learn more constructively how to use the scope of freedom available to them, (iv) the opportunity to use the knowledge to disseminate ideas that will lead to reform of working conditions that will enable them to do their jobs better.
- ***Understanding of line organisations, which are central to the modern democratic state,*** and recognising situations in which they play the role of mediators between the state, policies, and its politics.

1.3 Current Problems Solved by Implementation Studies and Possibilities for Their Mitigation by Line-Level Research

According to Hupe (2014, pp. 168-169), studies and research focused on policy implementation have, since their inception, been faced with the following four areas of problems formulated in the form of the research questions below, which were highlighted by Goggin et al. (1990, pp. 10-13) more than three decades ago:

- ***"The cases/variables problem"***: a persistent problem in implementation research is that there are too many cases and too many variables to consider. Whether this problem has been solved can be determined by asking, "*Have solutions been found to deal with the variety of potential explanatory variables?*"
- ***"The lack of estimates":*** implementation researchers have paid insufficient attention to precisely defining concepts, measuring variables, and specifying expectations about the relationships between them, which would ensure that the research is

comparative, longitudinal, and synthetic. The question here is, "*How do researchers address their relationship with the object of their research?"*

- ***"The neglect of the role of the states":*** in federal state research, the primary unit of analysis is the federal level. Numerous studies have so far neglected state and local variables that significantly affect policy implementation. This problem is answered by the question "*How do researchers handle the fact that policy implementation, almost by definition, implies the involvement of multiple actors on different layers?*"
- ***"Treating implementers as autonomous rational actors":*** the question of this issue is "*How do researchers deal with the consequences of the complex, non-technical nature of policy-making?*"

Currently, four types of problems persist in implementation research (Hill & Hupe, 2009), which are: (i) the "too many variables problem", which is equivalent to the "case/variable problem", where there is no single cause that influences the way a policy is implemented and its consequences, (ii) the "theory/practice relationship problem", which concerns the relationship between knowledge and practical actions of implementing actors, (iii) the "multi-layer problem", which is a consequence of the complexity of the implementation process, and (iv) the "problem of the relationship between the resulting policy and the policy being shaped and implemented", which represents the issue of how to conceive of policy analysis as a social-scientific analysis[20].

In response to these problems, some authors (i) have tried to reduce the number of variables to be considered, others (ii) have created models in an attempt to account for all identifiable variables, and still others (iii) have attempted to create a general theory of implementation, which is effectively approached as a "theory of doing" or a "theory of action" (for more details, see e.g., Hill & Hupe, 2021). Despite these efforts, a general/unified theory of implementation has not yet been created. The main reason is that the complexity of policy implementation and its connection to other parts of the policy process make it impossible to develop a single theory (e.g., Winter, 2012). A manifestation

[20] Many implementation theorists are simultaneously grappling with two issues that limit the ability to "generalise findings across policy systems or national contexts." Specifically, the issue concerns differences between types of policies or the problems they address, as well as between institutional contexts (Hill & Hupe, 2009, p. 43).

and consequence of these difficulties is the fact that ***implementation research is often carried out within limited topics*** such as "(new) governance", "policy design and policy instruments", "network studies", "outsourcing", "public-private partnerships", "street-level bureaucracy", "management", "new public management", "principal-agent studies", "performance" and/or "enforcement and compliance of rules and regulations".

In the above context, Hupe (2014) identified the following three streams of implementation studies, which differ in their approach to the above problems and at the same time in their potential for successful resolution:

- ***"Mainstream" implementation studies*** focused on performance, public sector reforms, and e-government;
- ***"Neo-" implementation studies*** focused on the implementation deficit and intergovernmental relations, especially between the European Union and its individual Member States, using a multi-level governance perspective; and
- ***"Advanced" implementation studies***, comprising one subcategory of studies focused on decision-making, delegation of powers, political control, and inter-organisational conflicts, and a second subcategory focused on inter-organisational relations and line bureaucracy (cf. eg., Sager, Mavrot & Keiser, 2024).

The first two streams are based on *the policy implementation paradigm*, use a single-case study design, employ qualitative methods, and adopt a "downward" theoretical approach. The last stream of studies goes "*beyond*" *the policy implementation paradigm*, examining it from the perspectives of other disciplines such as management and from different angles, using a "top-down" or "bottom-up" theoretical approach and employing a sophisticated research design that goes beyond a single case study (so-called "large n" studies).

In this context, Hupe (2014) argues that ***the most significant potential for addressing the problems mentioned above lies in the latest wave of implementation studies that employ a bottom-up theoretical approach, comparative perspectives, and cross-policy and cross-national boundaries.*** They address the "too many variables problem" by setting a limited number of hypotheses, the "theory/practice problem" and the "multi-layer problem" by focusing primarily on policy outcomes/implementer performance in the first case and on the practical decision-making and implementation layer or the line layer in the

second case, and the "policy/politics problem" by examining the observed rather than expected behaviour of implementers.

Chapter 2

FRONTLINE WORKERS AND THEIR ROLES IN PUBLIC POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: THE CONCEPT OF "STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRACY"

In this chapter, we explain the concept of "street-level bureaucracy" as articulated by Michael Lipsky and his successors, and situate it within the existing literature on public policy implementation and the political process. We structure the text into three parts, each with its own subchapters. First, we explain the concept of "street-level bureaucracy" in general terms and, at the same time, define "line bureaucrats," "line organisations," and their role in the political process in greater detail (subchapter 2.1). Subsequently, we examine the individual components/themes of the theory of "street-level bureaucracy" and their potential influence on policy implementation (subchapter 2.2). We consider these components/themes to be (i) the "nature of the work of line bureaucrats", which consists of the complexity of their work environment and the demanding working conditions, (ii) "discretion of line bureaucrats", representing the autonomy and freedom needed to cope with the demanding nature of the work, (iii) "discretionary behaviour of line bureaucrats" based on the creation and use of different coping mechanisms to deal with the demanding nature of their work in providing public services, (iv) "the role and influence of managers on line bureaucrats", and (v) possible "modes of providing public services" based on the use of bureaucratic, professional, bureau-professional and/or managerial practices. Finally, we focus on the current contributions of Lipsky´s concept/theory of "street-level bureaucracy" for understanding public policy implementation to date and summarise the key findings from this chapter (subchapter 2.3).

The presented findings will gradually provide answers to the following questions:

- ***"What is the essence of the theory of "street-level bureaucracy", who represent line bureaucrats, in what types of line organisations do they work, and what is their role in the political process?"***
- ***"What are the characteristics of the individual components/key themes forming the theory of "street-level bureaucracy", which influence the process of public policy***

implementation and the resulting modes of providing public services, and how can they be examined?"

- ***"What are the current contributions of the theory of "street-level bureaucracy" for understanding policy implementation?"***

2.1 The Theory of "Street-Level Bureaucracy" – A Framework Explanation of the Concept and Definition of "Line Bureaucrats" and "Line Organisations" and their Role in the Political Process

Lipsky used the term "street-level bureaucracy", which is equivalent to the term "point of entry" (Hall, 1974) or "public encounter" (Goodsell, 1981), as early as 1969 at a conference of the American Political Science Association at the University of Wisconsin (Lipsky, 1969). He explained this concept, which effectively constitutes a theory (Hupe, 2019a), in detail in his 1980 book, "Street-level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services." At this time, his students conducted research, including Jeffrey Prottas (1978, 1979) and Richard Weatherley (1980). As the title of the book suggests, the motive for devoting himself to this concept was for Lipsky (2010: xi) "a search for the place of the individual in public services" and to examine the dilemmas that individual line employees of public services – the so-called "street-level bureaucrats" – face when confronted with discrepancies between formal policy goals and the conditions under which they have to work during their implementation. Street-level bureaucrats are also referred to as "public service bureaucrats" (Thompson, 1967), "operators" (Simon, 1947; Wilson, 1989), "human service bureaucrats" (Goodsell, 1981), "public professionals" (Tummers et al., 2013) or, for short, "professionals" (Hupe, Hill & Buffat, 2015a; see eg., Fernandes, Santinha & Forte, 2022; Stephens, van Steden, & Schoonmade, 2024)[21].

The essence of ***Lipsky's concept of "street-level bureaucracy"*** is that it provides a theoretical framework for understanding the crucial role of public service workers employed at the line level in various state organisations during policy implementation. It

[21] According to Hupe, Hill, and Buffat (2015), street-level bureaucrats are professionals because they do not focus on following clearly defined rules, but on topics that require specific education. This type of worker was employed in some positions in the state administration as early as the early 19th century, especially in areas related to flood control, fire prevention, policing, and, later, public health.

reveals the difficulty of implementing public policy and the inconsistency between legislators' intended goals and the policy outcomes shaped by bureaucrats.

In Lipsky's (1980/2010) perspective, *the concept of "street-level bureaucracy"* can be characterised through the following statement, which contains four key themes on which this theory is based:

- ***Street-level bureaucrats are "pivotal" actors of public policy*** because they have discretionary powers and thus the possibility of independent judgment in deciding on the practices they will use, and at the same time have usually sufficient autonomy from superior actors, from the management of the organisation in which they work
- ***who create "coping mechanisms" to deal with the demanding work environment***, through which they influence the original intentions of the policies they are tasked with implementing,
- ***who occupy "dichotomised roles"*** in that on the one hand they must adhere to the "rigid" policy rules and objectives of the organisation and, at the same time, they are expected to treat individual clients compassionately on a case-by-case basis,
- ***and their "activities" become part of both the organisational policy in which they are employed and the public policies they implement.***

According to Brodkin (2015), Lipsky provided a "theoretical template for understanding street-level bureaucracies (street-level bureaucrats)," a label often used for public agencies. These are mostly portrayed as prototypes of Weberian bureaucracy, i.e., "relentlessly routinised people-processing agencies that represent the authority of the state and invite caricatures of 'le guichet' (the individual behind the counter) or the officious clerk with the green eyeshades" (p. 25). Lipsky effectively proposed an analytical framework that contextualised and made more transparent the struggles of bureaucrats at the lowest levels of the administration to do their jobs well because he showed that the blame for problematic practices may not lie with the bureaucrats themselves, but with the structural conditions they are forced to confront (p. 28).

Lipsky's concept of "street-level bureaucracy" from the perspective of its connection to implemented policy is based, according to Brodkin (2015, p. 29), on the following key theses:

- ***Policy should not be seen as a fixed but rather a vague construct***, because formal policy is usually ambiguous, contains a large number of often conflicting goals, and line practitioners are mainly able to exercise discretion in the course of their work.
- ***Policy effectively becomes the discretionary actions of line practitioners***.
- ***Discretion as a space for free judgment is the centre of interest because it is structured by factors that influence the informal behaviour of line practitioners***, which is thus systematically developed.
- ***Line bureaucrats occupy a politically significant position*** not because they act as "interpreters" of public policy, but ***because they function as "interface" between government and citizens.***

Lipsky's theory of "street-level bureaucracy" assumes that "discretion" is necessary for policy implementation, which involves "judgement" and "responsiveness" of line practitioners to individual circumstances, and can be used in authorised or unauthorised ways. This theory is not simple because it deals with "complex organisational behaviour as an integral part of the policy-making process", rather than treating it as a separate part (Brodkin, 2015, p. 30). For these reasons, the line perspective reverses the script of conventional policy research, focusing not on what formal policy requires, but on what an organisation actually produces during implementation (or "in the name") of policy. For this reason, its central interest is to examine "discretion," which helps explain the factors that shape policy implementation in patterned ways. It is therefore crucial to monitor the informal practices of line workers, which systematically structure their interactions and thus shape the distribution and content of policy-as-produced.

The key innovation of Lipsky's theory is that it allows us to understand line work "from the inside-out" perspective because it is not primarily concerned with what different actors, especially managers or policy-makers, want (expect) from line workers. Instead, it examines the "realities of work" of line workers directly involved in delivering policy at the line level, which often constrain their discretion in unexpected ways. ***It thus allows us to understand, and potentially predict, how changes in the work environment could alter their practices, often in the form of informal routines and thus the form of the resulting policy*** (Brodkin, 2015).

As noted in the previous chapter and as will be clear from the text below, Lipsky's concept of "street-level bureaucracy" has been taken up by many scholars and researchers. Given the scope, nature, and diversity of existing knowledge about street-level bureaucracy, which is the result of a large number of research studies using different conceptualisations, research designs, and epistemological approaches, according to Maynard-Moody and Portillo (2010), it is currently possible to consider "street-level bureaucracy" as a "theory" (see also Chang & Brewer, 2023; Lipsky, 2023).

2.1.1 Defining “Line Bureaucrats” and Their Role in the Political Process

As was already mentioned in the previous chapter, line bureaucrats represent different types of workers (e.g., teachers, police officers, social workers, judges, court officials, lawyers, health professionals, etc.) who are employed in various types of state organisations that provide diverse public services (e.g., in the areas of social security, social care, employment, security, healthcare, education, judiciary, police, etc.).

Line bureaucrats have several common characteristics that make them identifiable and distinguishable from other civil service workers, and which manifest themselves to varying degrees in reality (Hupe, Hill & Buffat 2015, p. 16; Zacka 2017, pp. 23–24; cf. Lipsky 1980, 2010[22]): (i) they work “at the bottom” of the organisational hierarchy, (ii) they are in direct contact with the individual citizens with whom they interact, (iii) they have room for their own discretion, (iv) they perform public tasks for the public good, and may be employed by private organisations if public functions have been contracted out to them, and (v) they perform specific tasks for which they have been trained to a greater or lesser extent (ranging from extensive professional education to basic instruction).

The above implicitly implies that line bureaucrats necessarily (i) have inherent discretion, (ii) function as “policy co-makers” and (iii) show a certain craftsmanship in fulfilling their tasks (Hupe, Hill & Buffat, 2015a). At the same time, it is essential to note that ***not all government line workers are line bureaucrats*** (Maynard-Moody & Portillo,

[22] Lipsky defined “street-level bureaucrats” as *“public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work… Typical street-level bureaucrats are teachers, police officers and other law enforcement personnel, social workers, judges, public lawyers and other court officers, health workers, and many other public employees who grant access to government programs and provide services within them”* (Lipsky, 1980, p. 3).

2010, p. 263). However, not every line bureaucrat works for a “line bureaucracy” (e.g., a relocation specialist may work for an urban renewal agency whose employees are mostly planners, builders and other technicians), and at the same time, not every employee of “line bureaucracies” is necessarily a “line bureaucrat” (e.g., clerks in a social services department or police officers with routine administrative tasks) (Lipsky, 1980, p. 213).

Of particular importance is ***the role that line bureaucrats can play in the policy implementation process.*** The performance of line workers is not unambiguous because policies are often ambiguous or contain conflicting definitions of problems and goals. The line organisation and the policy environment provide the arena in which problems are defined, and practical solutions are created (Caswell, Kupka, Larsen, & van Berkel, 2017). Lipsky himself (1978, 1980) justified the importance of examining and conceptualising the activities of line bureaucrats, especially by saying that this is the last of the stages of policy-making, during which, as nowhere else in the political process, the interaction between line workers and clients brings formal social policy to life (Lipsky, 1980, 2010). The activities of line bureaucrats become the organisation's policy to which they belong and, at the same time, the public policy they implement (Lipsky, 2010). Although Lipsky's assumptions about the role of line bureaucrats are grounded in a bottom-up model of policy implementation, Evans (2011) argues that Lipsky employs a top-down perspective. According to this author, Lipsky's theory arose as a result of his effort to connect the process of policy-making in the sense of "politics" and policy implementation, since Lipsky sees the strategic intention of a policy as a measure of discretion that is an irreducible core of the practices of line bureaucracies necessary for policy to work.

As we will specify further below, in this context, it is possible to distinguish in the existing literature ***different types of roles that line workers can perform***, which differ in whether they relate to (i) the implemented policy, (ii) the citizens to whom the policies are provided, or (iii) the organisation in which these workers are employed.

In the case of roles related to implemented policy, line workers can be perceived as either (i) mere “administrators”, “implementers” or “policy implementers”, or (ii) as “mediators” or “policy-makers”, or (iii) as “mediators of politics” or “political entrepreneurs”. Initially, public sector workers who come into contact with citizens were considered as “low-level workers”, who are mere “administrators” or “implementers” of

policies, who have negligible or no influence on implemented policy. However, many studies have shown that line workers, when exercising the discretionary forms of power at their disposal, make decisions and create routines and methods to address uncertainties and work pressures. They thus create the public policies they implement and can therefore be considered as "policy-makers" (Lipsky, 1980, 2010) rather than just "policy-takers" (Gofen, 2014) or "mediators of policy," as they translate formal policies into practice (Brodkin, 2013). This fact is reflected in the previously mentioned "gap" (May & Winter, 2009), sometimes called "street-level divergence"[23] (Brodkin, 2003; Gofen, 2014; Gofen, Sella & Gassner, 2019; Thomann, Maxia & Egge, 2023) between the outputs of line workers' activities and the outputs expected from the formal policies they implement[24]. This gap/divergence is a manifestation of the contradiction between line workers' actions and formal policy directives, or even the demands of their superiors. This divergence is inevitable (Majone & Wildavsky, 1978; Hill, 2006) due to the frequent ambiguity and vagueness of policy, and to the necessary discretion of line workers to address them (Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Brodkin, 2003; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; Sandfort, 2000; Evans, 2015a; Fowler, 2023). The causes of this gap/divergence are usually the result of line bureaucrats' choices, which may be rational[25], ethical[26], or professional[27] (Gofen, 2014; Gofen, Sella & Gassner, 2019; Thomann & Lieberherr, 2023; Demmke, 2024).

[23] Divergence can be seen as a "control problem" (Brehm & Gates, 1997) or as a "coordination problem" between levels of government (Keiser, 2010), according to some authors. On the other hand, if line bureaucrats are seen as policy-makers, they should not be controlled or regulated. However, rather than being empowered, they should be able to use their professional skills and experience to deliver services and thus solve problems fairly and equitably effectively (Carey & Foster, 2011; Dendhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Elmore, 1979; Evans & Harris, 2004; Handler, 1986). The results of the analysis of divergence in education, health and welfare policy in Israel conducted by Gofen (2014) show that the trigger for a change in the resulting policy compared to the planned formal policy is if the actions of line workers are transparent/open as opposed to hidden, collective as opposed to individual and focused on other-serving as opposed to self-serving (this is the so-called transparent, collective and other-serving divergence).

[24] Some authors use negative or positive labels to describe this deviation, such as "shirking" or "sabotage" (Brehm & Gates, 1997), "responsible subversion" (Hutchinson, 1990), or "positive deviance" (Haynes & Licata, 1995).

[25] This is a case of trying to overcome barriers such as limited resources and a stressful work environment, worker dispositions, or a principal-agent situation based on asymmetric information and different interests of the principal and the bureaucrat (Brehm & Gates, 1997; Brodkin, 2011; Riccucci, 2005).

[26] Ethical choice is usually based on the rights, responsibilities, and obligations of bureaucrats, which have moral and value foundations, or on comparing bureaucrats' obligations to follow instructions set out in regulations and legislation with moral principles (Loyens & Maeschalck, 2010).

[27] Professional choice is linked to employee or professional ideology and identity, and often at the same time to elements of bureaucratic culture in the sense of following a mission or fulfilling an expected role (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003).

According to Brodkin (2013), line bureaucrats often serve as “mediators of both policy and politics”. This is especially the case when policies are ambiguous or inconsistent, and workers have to participate in the process of their transformation. Their decisions and interpretations are thus de facto political. In this context, many authors argue that line workers can serve as “policy entrepreneurs” if they have the opportunity to participate in the policy-making process, particularly to reshape its design. An example is the tendency to lobby for legislative changes (for more details, see Cohen & Klenk, 2019; Cohen, 2021; Cohen & Aviram, 2021; Mettang, 2022; Edri-Peer et al., 2023; Silveira et al., 2024) or to innovate policies through inconspicuous administrative routines (Zhang & He, 2024). Workers can thus play a key role in shaping meaning and implementing public value (Paanakker, Hoevens & Stevenson, 2024; Brunetto, Franken & Xerri, 2025).

In relation to citizens as recipients of policies through which line bureaucrats can influence the quality of their lives (e.g., Bovens & Zouridis, 2002; Keiser, 1999; Riccucci, 2005), line workers can perform roles as (i) “citizen agent” as opposed to “state agent”, or as (ii) “advisor agent” or “service provider”. Line workers play a significant role in the public sphere not only because they influence policy implementation, but also because their work has implications for citizenship and democracy (Lotta, Piotrowska & Raaphorst, 2024). They can play a “leadership role” (Vinzant & Crothers, 1998) and possibly engage in “civic entrepreneurship” (Leadbeater & Goss, 1998) if their actions pursue civic goals (Gofen, 2014). In this context, they can be seen as “citizen agents” who should ideally treat all clients equally while responding to the individual needs of each of them as appropriately as possible (Lipsky 2010: xi) or as “state agents” responsible for implementing more formal policy decisions (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, 2012, 2022). Street-level bureaucrats in this context constitute a unique and essential group of public workers responsible for policy delivery, who are closest to citizens and operate at the operational core of the state (Gofen, Sella & Gassner, 2019). From the perspective of “citizen agents” versus “state agents”, it is also possible to view street-level bureaucrats as *“public actors who may have a belief in a just world”* (Hupe, Hill & Buffat, 2015b, p. 319). Workers reflect society's context to varying degrees. These experiences contribute to the formation of their “personal values”, which, together with their “social characteristics” (especially gender and/or ethnicity) and “psychological characteristics” (predominantly pre-existing

attitudes), influence the chosen way of interacting with different groups of clients (most often depending on whether they believe they deserve help or not) (Wilkins & Wenger, 2015).

Line workers can also, according to Lotta and Pires (2019), perform the role of "solvers of social inequalities". These consist of the unequal distribution of power, knowledge, income, and opportunities in societies, as line bureaucracy can be seen as an arena with the potential to create, maintain, and/or limit them.

The role played by line workers is also significantly influenced by the form of "national service provision models". While in some countries they may act as "referral agents" who recommend clients to external service providers (Jewell, 2007), in others they may play a significant role as "service providers" who deliver services directly to clients (Van Berkel, 2017a, b).

Line workers may also fulfil specific ***roles within the organisation for which they are employed***. An example of a role that can significantly influence policy implementation is the "brokers" role in filtering the exchange of information on which the distribution of public services is based (Bjerregaard & Klitmøller, 2010). Line workers are situated between the more or less intense internal structures of incentives and controls of their superiors and the everyday working conditions they experience when interacting with the users of the services they provide. Instead of addressing the problems perceived by workers as citizens, policies in these contexts are characterised by dysfunctional approaches to institutional requirements and organisational procedural gaps. Workers thus serve as a noise and barrier filter, hindering the smooth implementation of new institutional procedures through defensive strategies of "muddling through" and resistance (for more details, see, e.g., Björk, 2021; Elrick, 2022; Guo, Wen & Wong, 2022; Cox, 2023; McGuirk et al., 2025).

This fact has led to the view that traditional management systems of incentives and control are ineffective (Riccucci, 2005; Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Brodkin, 2000; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, 2022; Weissert, 1994). This failure was to be addressed by the introduction of New Public Management practices based on the values of empowerment, decentralization, management by output and documentation rather than adherence to detailed rules, and a more entrepreneurial role for public employees, which was to provide

greater scope for self-judgment, variation, individual responsiveness, and an emphasis on entrepreneurship (Meyer & Hammerschmid, 2006; Hood, 1991; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Bjerregaard & Klitmoller, 2010; Edri-Peer et al., 2023; Carlsson, Glimmerveen & Visser, 2025; Edri-Peer & Cohen, 2025a; Liu, Zhang & Meng, 2025).

***The role of line bureaucrats in public policy-making has become increasingly important in recent decades*.** If local managers and caseworkers are given at least partial responsibility for policy outcomes, they are better able to meet policy objectives in today's changing, heterogeneous world. In public social service provision, line workers must deal with at least two key trends that shape their role (Rice, 2012, pp. 1039-40).[28] (i) The first of these trends is the decentralisation of policy and the transfer of power to the local level. This has led to the need for workers to take on new tasks such as participating in the formulation of the organisation's policy objectives, developing new tools for helping clients, building policy networks with public and private organisations and social stakeholders, and autonomously managing budgets used in client processing (e.g., Durose, 2011; Ellis, 2011; Jansen et al., 2021; Klijn et al., 2025). (ii) At the same time, especially in the areas of unemployment, social care and to some extent also pensions, since the beginning of the 1990s, "activation policies" or "policy agendas activation" have been introduced (Clasen & Clegg, 2006; Eichhorst, Kaufmann, Konle-Seidl & Reinhard, 2008; Weishaupt, 2013; Jørgensen & Schulze, 2024). Their essence lies in activating clients by line workers through so-called "tailor-made services," so that clients become self-sufficient (Borghi & van Berkel, 2007; Newman, 2007; Schalk et al., 2014; Fuertes & McQuaid, 2016; Visser, 2025). In labour market policy, strong incentives are used for this activation, either in the form of "carrots" by providing job retraining, individual care, personal budgets for the reintegration of the unemployed into the labour market, or "sticks" by imposing requirements on clients to submit job applications or in the form of sanctions.

In the above context, it is helpful to note the direct connection between the roles line workers perform during the implementation of public policy and their identity. In this context, according to Hupe (2019e, pp. 489-490), it is possible to identify the so-called ***"triple identity" of line bureaucrats***, which manifests itself simultaneously. It is the identity

[28] For more information, see also the information provided in the introductory chapter on current trends in the provision of public services.

of (i) “public servant”, (ii) “front-office worker”, and (iii) “professional”. The “public servant” is represented by a public sector worker who is a co-creator of policy, pursues the general welfare, and whose referent institution is the state. The “front-office worker” participates in case treatment and is thus oriented toward people-processing (Prottas, 1979), struggles with external constraints on his own judgment, and regards his referent institution as society. The identity of a “professional” consists of the practice of craftsmanship by a worker who is trained, i.e., has sufficient skills, habits, competencies, and professional pride to do his job to the best of his ability and adheres to the standards of the profession (see Figure 2.1 below). Line bureaucrats may also have an additional identity in certain circumstances, which can be described as an “entrepreneur”. This is a situation where the worker is part of public-private arrangements and therefore tries to respond in accordance with market principles (cf. Thomann, Hupe & Sager, 2018; Klenk & Cohen, 2019; Lieberherr & Thomann, 2019; Cohen, 2021; Rizza & Lucciarini, 2022; Edri-Peer et al., 2023; Callens & Verhoest, 2024; Holm, Nielsen & Timmermans, 2025).

Figure 2.1 The triple identity of a street-level bureaucrat

INVOLVED IN:	MODUS	REFERENCE INSTITUTION	IDENTITY
Policy (co-) making	In public service	State	Public servant
Case treatment	Dealing with controlled freedom to act	Society	Front-office worker
Practising craftsmanship	Keeping up standards	Profession	Professional

Source: Hupe (2019e, p. 490)

In practice, triple identity manifests as workers in the same job, as one worker at different times, or as the same worker dealing with the same client, and workers develop and use combinations of these identities in various mixes. Moreover, line bureaucrats consider, during their work, which actions to use from a broad palette of prescribed actions in a given situation and how to make decisions, which often leads to conflicts that can be described as “identity conflicts”. The consequence can be the overshadowing of the professional and public servant dimensions by the front-office worker dimension (Hupe, 2019e).

2.1.2 Definition of "Line Bureaucratic Organisations" and Their Role in the Political Process

As has been mentioned several times above, line workers involved in the implementation of public policies work in "street-level bureaucracies", also known as "frontline organisations" (Smith, 1965), "state agencies", "citizen agencies" (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000), or "street-level organisations" (Brodkin, 2008). This is a unique type of government agency characterised by being "a locus for organisational initiatives," where there is "independent performance of tasks," and "difficult direct control" (Smith, 1965; cf. Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Brodkin, 2015; Keulemans & Groeneveld, 2020; Gruber, 2023; Christensen & Lægreid, 2025b).

At the time of Lipsky's (1980) book's publication, ***"line bureaucracies"*** represented modern, managerialized organisations, in which the issue was what policy produced, not the process of its implementation. The key regulators of line workers were managers, who used "performance indicators" to measure the output of their activities and "eligibility criteria" to measure the allocation of clients' access to services. Managers were struggling to achieve the organisation's goals. They distrusted the motives of line bureaucrats, who were seen as "resource units" used to achieve these goals, motivated by self-interest and the primary goal of processing clients and maximising goals (Lipsky, 1980, p. 25).

According to Brodkin (2013), it is now appropriate to broaden research interest in implementation at the line level to include the so-called ***"street-level organisations (SLOs)"***. These are "agencies and governmental departments that directly deliver policy to people", and a subset of them are "street-level bureaucracies" (p. 18). The reason for this is that, while in early studies line bureaucracies were the leading providers of public services and social policies, these services and policies are now delivered through various organisational forms. In addition to public bureaucracies, these include non-governmental organisations, for-profit companies, and mixed public-private arrangements. At the same time, significant developments in management, public administration, and governance have transformed the conditions for policy delivery.

These changes have led to a transformation of the possible view of the roles and functions of line organisations. In this context, Brodkin (2013) offers a conceptual framework based on the political-organisational approach, which allows ***line organisations***

to be viewed and studied through the following three conceptual approaches, which are equivalent to the above-mentioned roles of line workers:

- The traditional one-dimensional view, in which line organisations represent ***"agents of the state"*** who play an instrumental role in executing legislative and executive orders;
- The two-dimensional view, used since the 1980s, in which line organisations simultaneously represent ***"mediators of policy"***, or sites where both the terms of policy and the distribution of benefits and services are (re)negotiated; and
- The three-dimensional view, in which line organisations also represent ***"mediators of the politics"*** and processes of welfare state transformation, or sites of policy conflict, where politically contentious policy projects can be indirectly supported through administrative means, including managerial reforms that change the agreements and conditions of street-level policy work (cf. eg., Zacka, 2017; Jacobsson & Johansson, 2025).

Although the share of "line organisations" in the implementation of public policies is steadily increasing, according to Brodkin (2021), their role has so far received unjustifiably little attention[29]. This is, although they represent an "operational arm of the state" that ensures the fulfilment of key tasks related to the provision of a wide range of public services, such as health and social care, public safety, education, and others, on a daily basis. The extraordinary importance of these organisations' roles has become especially apparent in recent years, particularly in resolving acute, chronic, or combined crises (see e.g., Špaček, 2026). It has been clearly demonstrated that this type of organisation is far more vital than others. At the same time, they are "more visible" than any other organisation, as they become the centre of public interest and effectively fulfil the role of "crisis responders"[30]. In these situations, their employees can, in extreme cases, be met with admiration, e.g., the outpouring of applause for medical workers managing the COVID-

[29] In recent years, interest in research on line organisations has been growing slightly (e.g., Breidahl & Brodkin, 2023; Sichling, 2023; Spitzmueller, 2023).

[30] In the case of sudden and unexpected acute crises, according to Brodkin (2021), informal organisational practices (routines) implemented in line organisations may be disrupted, to which organisations may respond either by adaptation, resistance, innovation, or redirection. At the same time, the crisis may disrupt the structural arrangements in which line organisations operate to varying degrees, leading to a rearrangement of existing governance structures, the involvement of new line organisations usually in the form of a contract, and the departure of existing line organisations.

19 crisis, or, conversely, be considered public villains, e.g., during public protests against police officers.

2.2 Key Components/Themes of the "Street-Level Bureaucracy" Theory and Their Possible Impact on Policy Implementation

The findings presented in the previous subchapter clearly show that the theory of "street-level bureaucracy" comprises several key "components/themes" that have become the focus of theoretical and, especially, empirical research by many authors. In our opinion, these components can be considered as (i) "the nature of work", (ii) "discretion" and (iii) "discretionary behaviour" of line bureaucrats, (iv) "the role and influence of managers" on line bureaucrats and (v) "modes of providing public services" to clients (cf. Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Brodkin, 2015; Hupe, Hill & Buffat, 2015a; Hupe, 2019b; Chang & Brewer, 2023; Alecu, Sadeghi & Terum, 2025 - see subchapter 1.2.1 for more details).

We believe that a closer look at these topics and the empirical studies that address them enables us to better understand what can actually happen when line bureaucrats implement public policies and, at the same time, what all the "factors" can influence this process and the resulting form of public services provided. For this reason, we will discuss these "components/topics" in more detail in the following five subchapters.

2.2.1 Component/Theme 1 – Nature of the Work of Line Bureaucrats: Complex Work Environments and Challenging Working Conditions that Create Dilemmas

Line workers transform policies into concrete practices through their activities, which are not structured only by these policies. The nature of the "work environment" and the specific "working conditions" of line workers influence their decision-making, which is typically framed in terms of resources, goals, or performance measures, and thus play a significant role (Lipsky, 1980, 2010). The work environment of line workers is typically characterised by "complexity", and the organisations in which line workers work are characterised by "challenging working conditions" (Lipsky, 1991). Both can cause stress or pose physical hazards to line workers (Lipsky, 1969).

The "complexity" of the line worker environment, which is also referred to as a "moral agency" confronting workers with a competing set of normative pressures (Zacka, 2017) or

as a "matrix of influences" (Vinzant & Crothers, 1996), lies in the fact that line workers work in "complex contexts" (Vinzant & Crothers, 1998; Austin et al., 2009; van Berkel, Caswell, Kupka, & Larsen, 2017; Chang & Brewer, 2023; Lotta, Nieto-Morales & Peeters, 2024; Mousa, Althalathini & Puhakka, 2025)[31]. These frame the space for their independent decision-making because, on the one hand, they constrain their actions, and on the other, they enable them. These contexts are usually shaped, in addition to (i) policies and laws, mainly by (ii) the agencies and organisations for which workers work, (iii) supervisors and colleagues, (iv) professional associations to which workers belong, (v) other organisations that play a role in policy delivery, and (vi) the clients to whom public services are provided. As a result of new forms of governance used in the delivery of public policies in recent decades, this complexity continues to increase (Borghi & Berkel, 2007; Møller & Stone, 2013; Hupe & van Kooten, 2015; van Berkel, 2020; Jansen et al., 2021; Cohen, 2023; Nielsen & Andersen, 2024; Osborne, Bianchi & Macfarlane, 2025).

The "difficulty" of working conditions for line bureaucrats is often due to many reasons. The key ones include the following (Lipsky, 1969, 1980, 1991, 2010; Kaufman, 1960; Downs, 1967; Heclo, 1977; Wilson, 1989; Keiser, 1999; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, 2022; Wagenaar, 2004; Murphy & Skillen, 2015; Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2018; Hupe, 2019a; Stanica et al., 2020; Eriksson & Johansson, 2022; Rowe, 2024):

- ***Ambiguous goals and rules, and often a large number of complex rules*** which are mostly vague, conflicting, and/or contradictory in the case of goals, or incomplete, inappropriate, or vague in the case of rules, and cause uncertainty, increased administrative burden, and "policy confusion";
- ***Permanently insufficient resources of various kinds*** needed to implement individual tasks ***and the uncertain effectiveness of methods*** make it impossible to achieve all tasks, which applies in particular to financial, personnel, technological, information, and time resources;
- ***Variable and therefore indefinite and unpredictable work situations***, which cause deep uncertainty, are often accompanied by time pressure and incomplete

[31] Van Berkel et al. (2017) distinguished between "policy context", "governance context", "organisational context", and "professional context" (we discuss these in more detail in Chapter 3.1.2).

information about clients and require the achievement of complex tasks for which rules, guidelines, or instructions have not been developed;

- ***High workload*** caused by often excessive demands and pressures from superior managers for high performance, even though it is mainly difficult to monitor and evaluate, and at the same time, by a large number of clients who are forced to involuntarily use the services provided because they have no other choice; and
- ***Ambiguous expectations of their role by superiors and the public, and conflicting demands from clients.***

Moreover, some types of line workers are increasingly exposed to so-called ***"emotional labour"*** as a process through which they manage to provide public services that damage their identity. These are workers who perform so-called "dirty work" that can be physically, socially and morally demanding, cause stigma and are a frequent reason for high turnover of these workers who are usually represented by firefighters, emergency medical workers, probation officers, law enforcement officers or public defenders (for more details, see Cho & Song, 2017; Mastracci, 2022; Lotta et al., 2024; Westaby et al., 2025).

The key problem of line work, according to most authors on line bureaucracy, is insufficient resources, which usually manifests as the work line bureaucrats require exceeding what is provided to them to perform their tasks. Hupe and Buffat (2014) refer to this problem as the "public service gap" and explain it as follows. (i) On the "demand side" – i.e., what is expected of line workers – constraints can be identified in the form of prescribed ways of acting. These are the so-called "action prescriptions" that set out the preferred behaviour of line workers and are usually (a) formal rules such as legal requirements, policy objectives, organisational or performance targets, (b) professional norms in the form of work guidelines, and (c) societal expectations (Hupe & van der Krogt, 2013). (ii) Conversely, on the "supply side" – that is, what workers can offer – these are the prescribed resources that line workers have at their disposal and enable them to perform the permitted tasks. These are the so-called "action resources" or "enablements" or "management-by-enabling" (Brodkin, 2011a) and their sources are mainly (a) training, (b) education, (c) professional experience, (d) time, (e) information, (f) other employees, and (g) budget (Brodkin, 2011b). In practice, the number of prescribed actions and prescribed

resources may increase, decrease, or remain stable. In the case of a lack of resources, three situations can arise where line workers are forced to: (1) “doing more with less”, (2) “doing the same with less”, or (3) “doing more with the same” (Hupe & Buffat, 2014).

Moreover, the work of line bureaucrats is increasingly influenced and made more difficult by the following three key trends (Hupe, 2019a, pp. 8-9): (i) so-called “rule piling” due to the fact that the modern state has developed an apparatus that constantly creates formal rules that can take various forms from constitutional charters and formal laws to statutory and executive orders to policy programs and operational protocols, coming from the top down and it is up to line bureaucrats to decide how to deal with this large number of rules, (ii) “digitalisation” in the form of the introduction of new technologies such as the Internet and social media, smartphones and computer applications (Verhoest et al., 2024), which primarily affect the work process of line bureaucrats (Kühler et al., 2025), who often complain that the large amount of paperwork prevents them from direct contact with clients, and (iii) the “cultural individualism” of citizens who consider themselves “their own boss” (Hupe & Edwards, 2012) and, as pragmatic consumers, often more or less assertively demand services from line workers as a legitimate demand for the money they have paid to the state (cf. Davidovitz, 2024).

The above-mentioned facts regarding the complex work environment and demanding working conditions give rise to ***various dilemmas***. These make it impossible to ensure or predetermine how line workers should behave in diverse situations characterised by “complexity”, “uncertainty” and “ambiguity” (cf. Jewell and Glaser 2006). These dilemmas represent more or less conscious role contradictions, which can be described as “manifest dilemmas” or “latent dilemmas”[32]. They can concern either (i) workers’ considerations about the nature of the public programs provided (so-called “strategic” dilemmas), or they can be dilemmas that (ii) influence the specific ways workers interact with clients (so-called “everyday dilemmas”) (Musil, 2004; cf. Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Jasper, 2019). In the case of “strategic dilemmas”, this may involve considerations, for example, of whether existing social programs should serve society as a whole or the partial interests of selected actors,

[32] An “manifest dilemma” refers to all situations where working conditions force employees to immediately choose between two, from their point of view, incompatible options. A “latent dilemma”, on the other hand, represents a state in which employees who have previously found a way to resolve the dilemma forget the circumstances that made their previous actions difficult (for more details, see Musil, 2004, pp. 38-40).

whether the choice of goals should be direct or mediated, or whether changes should be made to the system and/or the intervention environment or the life situation of a specific client. "Everyday dilemmas", on the other hand, mainly concern the possibility of contradictory goals, the quality of services, the selection of clients, the relationship towards them and dealing with them, the type of assistance provided, and the decision whether to address the client's needs at all or not (for more details, see Musil, 2004; Musil, Kubalčíková & Nečasová, 2008; Nečasová, 2020; Mikulcová et al., 2024)[33]. Awareness of these dilemmas can be helpful, as it helps us identify the complexity of the goals line workers pursue and the specific ways they interact with clients.

Line workers try to cope with the demanding and complex working conditions that cause them dilemmas by mitigating them through inventing and applying special procedures that can be described as ways of "coping" (see the following subchapter 2.2.3, which discusses discretionary behaviour and ways of coping). For line workers to be able to create and apply diverse ways of coping, they need to have sufficient space for independent judgment – "discretion", which forms another critical component of the theory of "street-level bureaucracy" (see the following subchapter 2.2.2, for more details). The importance of discretion lies in its enabling workers to develop functional solutions to the challenges mentioned above, which arise from a complex environment and demanding working conditions, and to adapt general goals, formal rules, and orders from above to the specific situations they face every day.

2.2.2 Component/Theme 2 – Discretion of Line Bureaucrats: The Need for Autonomy and Freedom to Cope with the Demanding Nature of Work

As has been mentioned several times, line workers providing public services are characterised by the fact that, to achieve the goals of implemented policies and thus to fulfil public tasks in a work environment characterised by "complexity" and "demanding working conditions", they require a certain amount of so-called "discretion". This allows them to consider which legislative rules to use in a particular situation and how to apply

[33] Specifically, it is possible to identify dilemmas between (i) complex or simplified goals, (ii) number of clients or quality of services, (iii) neutrality towards clients or favouritism towards some of them, (iv) one-sidedness or symmetry of the relationship with clients, (v) procedural or situational approach, (vi) material or non-material assistance, and (vii) intervention as an attempt to solve the case or non-intervention (for more details, see Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Musil, 2004).

them. At the same time, it is influenced by rules of a social and organisational nature (Hawkins, 1992, 2022), which shape the course of their encounters with individual citizens and thus ensure that similar cases are solved similarly (Baumgartner, 1992). Line workers thus exercise discretion in adapting to working conditions, and the resulting policy should ideally be enacted.[34]

Perspectives, Definitions, and Alternatives to the Term Discretion

Furthermore, what exactly is "discretion"? As has been suggested, discretion refers to the line bureaucrats are supposed to follow, or instead to the line they actually follow when implementing public policy (Wagenaar, 2020). It refers to both forms of restriction on line workers' freedom and a specific "room to make choices" that occurs exclusively at the line level (Hupe & Hill, 2020).

The topic of discretion has been addressed by many experts across various social science disciplines, who have drawn on their ***specialised perspectives to define and examine discretion within different theoretical frameworks***. Most often, they are experts in law, economics, sociology, or political science, including public policy and public administration (see Figure 2.2 for more details). The reason is that discretion, as a concept and field of study, requires crossing boundaries between the aforementioned disciplines, as it encompasses *many topics*. In particular, "actors' freedom and capacity to act" and an awareness that this freedom is also "constrained" and "regulated/controlled", with a tension between freedom and control explored through concepts such as "permission", "accountability", and "trust" (Evans & Hupe, 2020, p. 9).

[34] Line workers can achieve this in two ways: they can create and apply simplifying procedures to successfully manage demands placed on them, such as limiting interactions with clients or information needed to complete paperwork (Lipsky, 1980; Hagen, 1987; Brodkin, 1997), or they can substitute difficult-to-achieve goals for achievable goals, for example by following procedural requirements known as "goal displacement" (Blau, 1955; Simon, 1983; Brodkin, 1997).

Figure 2.2 Perspectives from different disciplines on defining, perceiving, and examining discretion

DISCIPLINE	DEFINITION OF DISCRETION	DISCRETION PERSPECTIVE	DISCRETION RESEARCH TOPICS
Law	• The translation of rules into action, where rules create limits within which legitimate decisions can be made	• The appropriateness of exercising legitimate authority within the limits set by the legislature	• The interplay between rules and discretion
Economy	• Compliance, deviation, or divergence between the empowered (principal) and agents (authorised organisations)	• Costs and risks of delegation, conflicting interests, and trust between the empowered (principal) and agents (authorised organisations)	• Control over actors in contexts of different interests and transaction costs
Sociology	• Possession of freedom and limitation of discretion	• Interpretation and use of professional rules and conventions of public officials as members of the profession	• Social interaction processes within organisations and at their boundaries
Political science **Public policy** **Public administration**	• Legitimate space and, at the same time, a degree of freedom from external control to make decisions and exercise one's own judgment on how to provide public services	• Actions of public actors that require the appropriate use of "governance skills"	• The legitimacy of the functioning of power mechanisms and the importance of behaviour influenced by interests • Description and assessment of the freedom of public officials working mainly at the line level of government

Source: author based on Hupe (2013) and Evans & Hupe (2020)

There are numerous ***definitions of discretion*** in the existing literature, which differ in more detail in specifying what the "freedom" available to actors´ concerns. It is most often defined as the ability to act independently, calculate, interpret, apply and enforce rules, make choices and decisions, e.g., on the quantity and quality of sanctions and rewards offered in implementing policies (for more details, see Hupe, 2013; Evans & Hupe, 2020; Andreotti, Coletto & Rio, 2023; Da Roit & Busacca, 2024). In this context, Lipsky (1980/2010) defined discretion as the freedom to decide or act according to one's own will or judgment. However, definitions of discretion necessarily recognise that rules and regulations always constrain it. Discretion in this context can be defined, for example, as (i) a situation where effective limits on power leave the worker free to make a choice among possible courses of action or inaction (Davis, 1969), (ii) an open area surrounded by a belt of restrictions, which can be paraphrased using the metaphor of a "hole in a doughnut"

(Dworkin, 1977), or (iii) the effective decision-making room for manoeuvre available to a public official in a context in which rules and regulations exist (Hill & Hupe, 2020).

From the above, it follows that ***discretion is most often perceived as a more or less controlled "freedom to act"***, explicitly or implicitly defined by a set of rules and simultaneously realised by actors as they consider the internalised, prescribed rules of conduct. In addition to this perspective, which views discretion as a necessary freedom for line actors to better achieve policy goals, there is an opposing approach. In it, discretion is perceived, especially by lawyers, as a "necessary evil", a consequence of insufficient restriction of subordinate actors' freedom by superior actors, which often leads to an implementation gap in policy output (Hupe & Hill, 2020, p. 237). These two opposing perspectives show that discretion can be perceived in the first case as (i) "interpretation of rules", respectively "space in the rules", which occurs in situations where there is a gap between the law and social reality, and actors decide which rules to apply in situations where there may be different or similar interpretations of the rules. Discretion thus allows policy to be adapted to individual circumstances and changing conditions. In the second case, discretion can be seen as (ii) "space outside the rules" (so-called "the hole in the doughnut"), which is not covered by the rules. These are situations in which bureaucrats deviate from, subvert, modify, or break the rules (Collins, 2016).

At the same time, it is possible to identify various designations of activities performed by civil servants at the lowest levels of government and state administration in the existing literature and research in the field of public policy, public administration, and public management that can be considered ***alternatives to the term discretion***. These include, for example, "law enforcement", "rule application" and "rule compliance", or "exercising discretion" or "street-level/front-line decision-making" (for more details, see Hupe, 2013; Zang, 2016; Zang & Musheno, 2017; Mascini, 2020; Marienfeldt, 2024; Carlsson, Glimmerveen & Visser, 2025).

Discretion can also be seen as part of ***a broader administrative system*** in which the rules of law and the responsibility to exercise power frame other standards and influence the process by which standards are given meaning (Galligan, 1990)[35]. These include

[35] According to Galligan (1990, p.15), discretion occurs in the context of standards, some of which more significantly guide, constrain, and influence decision-making methods. Discretionary powers represent

“cultural standards” in the form of norms, beliefs, and knowledge that are part of organisational culture and significantly determine expectations, direction, and resulting behaviour. They also include “social standards” that line workers confront and can define themselves by, depending on their power. These are usually the standards of local communities, professions, clients, and the nation as a whole.

Discretionary Powers, Multidimensionality, Areas, Types, and Regimes of Discretion

The exercise of discretion depends on discretionary powers, which are the authority to choose among alternative courses of action, where the discretionary choice is a function of standards (Calligan, 1990). The key elements influencing the decision then include (i) ascertaining the facts, (ii) setting standards, and (iii) applying the standards to the facts. This process corresponds to the solution of the client's problem, divided into individual phases, which we have used to construct the "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers" (for more details, see Chapter 4, subchapter 4.1). The extent of discretion may differ among line workers: (i) while the provision of some public services requires limited discretionary decision-making, as they are often only “administrative acts”, e.g., payment of social assistance benefits (Roman, 2015; Yeboah-Assiamah, Otchere-Ankrah & Alesu-Dordzi, 2018; Sowa & Selden, 2023; Lovell, 2024; Suparto et al., 2024), (ii) in other services, workers are intentionally granted sufficient autonomy/discretion, as they are faced with often “complex processes requiring a professional approach”, e.g., deciding on ways to support and assist different groups of unemployed clients (Mashaw, 1983; van Berkel & van der Aa, 2012; Visser & Kruyen, 2021; Chang & Brewer, 2023; Peters, 2025; Fowler, 2025).

Of particular importance is the fact that discretion is multidimensional (Hupe, 2013). The distinction can be made between “discretion-as-granted” and “discretion-as-used”, which is manifested in the behaviour of the line bureaucrat. Discretion-as-used may not be

subsystems of authority within which officials have a degree of freedom and autonomy to act as they see fit. In the administrative environment, officials do not simply formulate decision-making rules to apply precisely to individual situations; instead, they maintain a specific relationship between general standards and specific cases.

exercised in practice in some situations for various reasons (for more details, see Hupe, Hill, & Buffat, 2015a; Grandy & Hiatt, 2020; de Boer & Raaphorst, 2023; Choi, Park & Lee, 2025).

At the same time, line workers can exercise discretion across different areas of the public services they provide, or simultaneously employ multiple forms of discretion. In the first case, workers can exercise discretion over the "processes of service delivery" using the "transactional" or "situational leadership style" of clients, which often occurs together with other line workers-colleagues, and also over their "outputs" using the "transformational leadership style", or over both using a combination of the above mentioned styles (Vinzant & Crothers, 1998; Henderson & Pandey, 2013; Alqatawenh, 2018; Hai, Van & Thi, 2021; Dong, 2023; Bao, Zhang & Yang, 2025). In the second case, it is possible to distinguish among different types of discretion based on the tasks that line workers perform. Among the many kinds of discretion[36] that have been mentioned so far, it is possible to distinguish, for example, the distinction according to the type of task performed into "administrative discretion" used in the provision of benefits and "creative discretion" used in the provision of services (Walker, 2015; Forester, Verloo & Laws, 2023), or "negotiated discretion" that is the result of interactions between workers and clients (Johannessen, 2019[37]; Jacobsen, 2023).

The waves of public administration reforms that have gradually occurred in most developed countries since Lipsky (1969) first introduced the concept of "street-level bureaucracy" have had a significant impact not only on the scope of line workers' discretion but also on the emergence of ***new types of discretion***. Specifically, at the time of Lipsky's research on line bureaucrats in the 1970s in the United States and between the 1940s and 1970s in Great Britain, the idea of "bureau-professionalism" was promoted, based on the

[36] Furthermore, it is possible distinguish, for example, between (i) "bureaucratic", "line", "values", "rules" and "task" discretion, (ii) "informal" discretion, (iii) "objective" discretion relating to the application of the law/rule application styles and "subjective" discretion relating to the management of overload/coping strategies, (iv) "low" discretion controlled by agency rules and "high" discretion based on professional judgment, (v) "professional" discretion exercised especially by social workers in management roles, and (vi) "agency" or "state bureaucratic" discretion (for more details see Hupe, 2013).

[37] In presenting "negotiated discretion", Johannessen (2019) distinguishes between the "structural context" in which negotiation takes place and the "negotiation context", which represents the structural properties or conditions directly entering into negotiation. These include (i) the number of negotiators and their experience with negotiation, (ii) single-, repeated-, sequential-, ordered-, multiple-, and linked negotiation, (iii) the balance of power, (iv) the visibility of transactions to others, (v) the number and complexity of negotiated issues, (vi) the clarity of the boundaries of legitimacy of the topics being negotiated and (vii) the options for avoiding or terminating negotiations.

control of compliance with bureaucratic rules (i.e. standards and eligibility rules) by line bureaucrats and at the same time on the use of their professional expertise in identifying individual needs (Ellis, 2011). The idea of bureaucratic professionalism was gradually replaced by "managerialism", "professionalism", and "client empowerment" from the early 1980s, as a result of social reforms that altered the work environment and the scope of line workers' autonomy[38]. In addition to the existing "defensive exercise of discretion" that line workers used to cope with the demanding working conditions, according to Ellis (2011), other entirely new types of discretion emerged. Specifically, they are (i) "value discretion", which allowed professionals to use sound and ethical judgment based on their professional education and codes of conduct, (ii) "rule discretion", which allowed them to adapt rules to unpredictable or complex situations, (iii) "task discretion", which allowed them to carry out multidimensional tasks, and (iv) "administrative discretion", which due to high expectations from professional line workers who are faced with limited resources allowed them to act beyond their authority, or even resort to repressive activities, even when they contradict, for example, their professional codes of ethics (see e.g., Otenyo, 2023; Zhou, 2024; Decarolis et al., 2025). Administrative discretion does not represent a deviation from formal administrative rules. Still, a practical judgment that is proportionate to reality, often fragmented and decentralised public responsibility, and discretionary behaviour thus represents a "form of street-level practice" (Wagenaar, 2020; Carroll & Yeo, 2023).

In connection with the above mentioned reforms, according to Needham (2020), it is possible to distinguish following three ***regimes of discretion*** in implementing organisations significantly influenced by managerialism, depending on whether discretion is perceived as desirable or undesirable: (i) "dominant managerialism", where discretion is undesirable and the organisation's management limits it, (ii) "street-level bureaucracy", where discretion is widespread and desirable, but problematic, and (iii) "discursive

[38] In particular, the introduction of neoliberal principles within the New Public Management into state administration, which is often referred to as "new managerialism," has significantly contributed to the standardisation of work procedures and interactions between line workers and clients. It has been shown that the degree of this standardisation significantly affects clients' ability to express their problems and participate in their solution. The more precisely Line workers follow these neoliberal principles, the fewer opportunities clients have to participate in solving them with these workers (for more details, see Matarese & Casswell, 2018). The reason for this is that the managerial discourse promoted within the New Public Management is, on the one hand, emancipatory, emphasising choice, control, and client independence, but, on the other hand, clients are contractually obligated to fulfil the tasks prescribed to them responsibly (Scourfield, 2007).

managerialism", where the discretion of line workers is dependent on local conditions and draws on a range of sources and alliances.

The Importance of Discretion for Actors in the Political Process and for Policy Recipients

The authors' approach to discretion in terms of its desirability or undesirability actually differs depending on whether they represent a "top-down" or "bottom-up" approach (DeLeon & DeLeon, 2002; Hill & Hupe, 2021; Buzogány & Pülzl, 2024).

In a "top-down" perspective, discretion is often undesirable. Policy-makers believe that line bureaucrats often use it to advance their own private goals, which can negatively affect the policy program to be implemented. In fact, its effectiveness and democratic legitimacy are undermined, and control mechanisms are therefore often introduced to ensure compliance with policy-makers' original intentions (Davis, 1969; Brehm & Gates, 1999). At the same time, discretion could harm the position of the citizen, because the individual considerations and interpretations of the program's goals by the line bureaucrat prevent him from treating citizens equally.

In the "bottom-up" perspective, by contrast, discretion is regarded as inevitable and desirable. It enables the interpretation of broadly formulated goals and the management and significant influence of services provided in situations where uniform procedures do not exist (Lipsky, 2010; Evans, 2010a). It is crucial to apply general rules, regulations, and standards to specific situations, thereby improving the effectiveness and public support for the implemented program. Line workers can decide which rules to use in a given situation, taking into account the current nature of demanding working conditions (Brodkin, 1997; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2010). Discretion also enhances the meaningfulness of policy for clients, as programs can be tailored to their specific circumstances (Brodkin, 1997; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, 2022; Tummers, 2011, 2017; Hassan et al., 2023b; Choi, Park & Lee, 2025).

2.2.3 Component/Theme 3 – Discretionary Behaviour of Line Bureaucrats: Coping Strategies Used to Address the Demanding Nature of Work and in Providing Services to Citizens

Mechanisms Used by Line Workers Within Their Discretion to Address Challenging Working Conditions during Service Provision

The way in which line workers in public administration exercise discretion is significantly influenced by various pressures from different directions, usually from public administration, professionals, and society (Noordegraaf & Steijn, 2013). To cope with these pressures on a daily basis and especially with demanding working conditions, ***line workers usually use the following mechanisms (ways, strategies) by which they informally adapt their work to the formal rules, structures and situations that affect them*** (Lipsky 1980, 2010; Nielsen, 2006; Brodkin & Majmundar, 2010; Ellis, 2011; Nordegraaf & Stejin, 2013; Tummers et al., 2015; Lotta & Pires, 2019; Volckmar-Eeg & Vassenden, 2022; Gjersøe & Strand, 2023; Lotta et al., 2024; Edri-Peer & Cohen, 2025b):

- ***"Coping"*** with uncertainties, stress, and psychological exigencies by mass processing clients, which relate to work procedures and service allocation, especially by stereotyping, screening, and prioritizing clients, and requiring stamps and recommendations, which allows workers to (i) simplify their tasks, (ii) reduce the group of clients to a manageable number, and (iii) provide the illusion that a given public policy is being effectively implemented;
- ***"Creaming"*** as a special way of coping with and allocating services by client selection, which consists of choosing well-defined and straightforward cases over complex, chaotic, and time-consuming cases or those cases with a high probability of success, even though workers are instructed to treat all clients equally. This enables workers to achieve (i) desirable work performance assessed by superiors, (ii) alignment with their own vision/ideal of work, and thus (iii) organisational credibility;
- ***"Gatekeeping"*** whereby workers change their perceptions of clients, reinterpret clients' eligibility, and develop informal criteria or impose additional costs on their access to public goods and services;
- ***"Networking"*** involves seeking horizontal feedback and creating shared goals with colleagues within the organisation; and/or

- ***"Activism"*** as an effort to change working conditions and reduce external pressure by addressing resource constraints, by neither accepting nor compensating for this pressure.

Of the above mechanisms for dealing with difficult working conditions, the concept of "coping" has long been the focus of most authors dealing with street-level bureaucracy (Tummers, 2012; Tummers, Bekkers & Steijn, 2012; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014; Tummers et al., 2015; Davidovitz & Cohen, 2023; Mikkelsen et al., 2023; Lotta et al., 2024; Edri-Peer & Cohen, 2025b). It focuses on how line workers behave ("cognitive coping") and what they do ("behavioural coping") in response to stress while providing public services (Tummers & Bekkers, 2020). In this context, ***three broader categories (families) of coping*** have been identified (Tummers et al., 2015; Hupe & Hill, 2020): (i) "rule bending " in an effort by workers to be flexible and responsive to clients' interests, (ii) "rule breaking" or "moving away from clients", and (iii) "rigid rule enforcement" or "moving against clients" which is associated with workers' repressive (punitive) attitude towards clients[39].

Previous research suggests that ***line workers most often use the first of the above-mentioned coping categories, also known as "moving towards clients"***, where they spend most of their time trying to find rules that are meaningful to their clients. Two main reasons can be identified for this choice. The first is that they like their work because it (i) provides them with self-fulfilment, (ii) they are aware of its social significance, and (iii) they have a team spirit named as "esprit de corps", which is manifested in that they feel like professionals whose main task is to implement political programs, whether they like the policy or not. The second reason is the sense of responsibility for what they do, which has several directions: towards (i) political and administrative authorities, (ii) colleagues and peers, and (iii) clients and the public (Hupe & Hill, 2020).

In countries where managerial reforms in public administration have been more pronounced in recent decades, line workers have also been forced to develop "informal

[39] While cognitive coping strategies in relation to clients usually involve client-oriented cynicism, empathy with clients, and emotional distancing from clients, behavioural coping strategies may take the form of aggression, routine, service allocation, or the use of personal resources to help clients, in addition to the above-mentioned rule bending and breaking. Line workers may also use behavioural coping strategies that are not focused on client interaction; these include, for example, social support from colleagues, complaining about managers, turnover, or substance abuse (Tummers et al., 2011).

coping strategies" in addition to "formal coping strategies" mentioned above. These are often referred to as (i) "responsible subversion" (Hutchinson, 1990), (ii) "creative insubordination" (Haynes & Licata, 1995), or (iii) "positive deviance" (Carey & Foster, 2011). These strategies have responded mainly to the lower flow of investment in public administration, the demand to shift administrative costs to clients, the prioritisation of speed over client needs, and consisted in replacing former ritual activities and delegitimising client requests for help (e.g., Brodkin, 2011b; Kras et al., 2021; Gofen, Meza & Chiques, 2022; Zuber, Strach & Pérez-Chiqués, 2024).

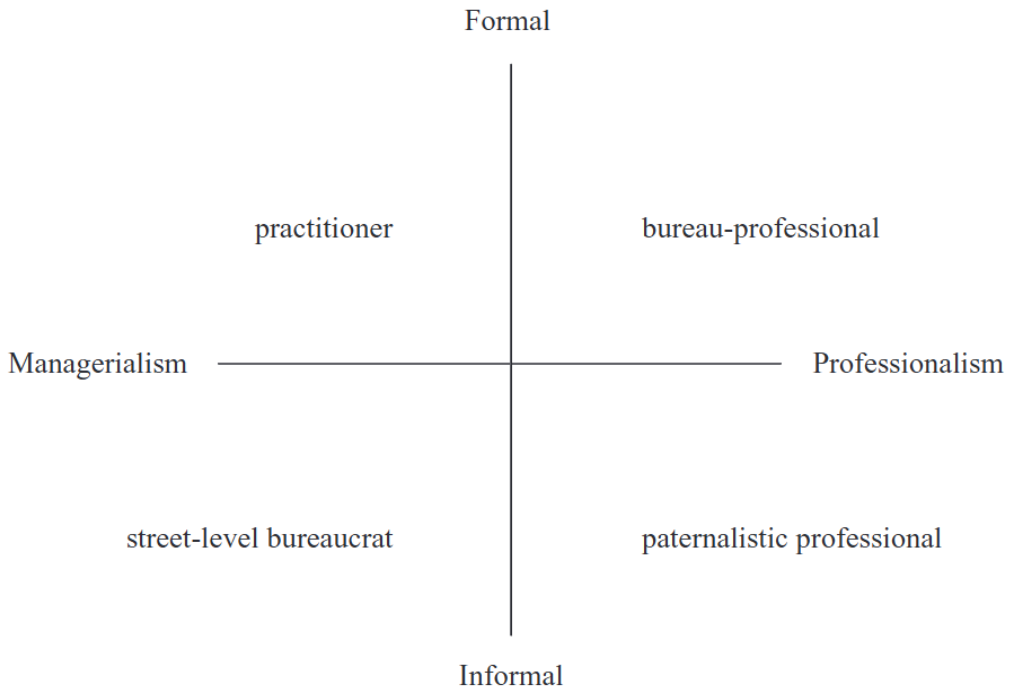
Types of Workers Using Different Forms of Discretion and the Influence of their Extent, Perception of the Usefulness of the Policy for Clients, and Workers' Personalities on Policy Implementation

The extent to which line workers exercise discretion depends not only on their job position and the type of work they perform, but also on their worker type. In this context, Ellis (2011) identified four ***"forms of discretion"*** through theoretical analysis. These correspond to diverse ***"types of frontline workers"***, who differ in the dilemmas they face in a given organisational environment and who (logically) provide public services in various ways. To identify these workers, Ellis used a taxonomy of line discretion, consisting of two dimensions: (i) the influence of "managerialism" versus "professionalism" on their discretionary behaviour, and (ii) the distinction between "formal" and "informal" practices they use when exercising discretion. Specifically, she defined: (1) the "practitioner" with formal discretion using predominantly managerial practices, (2) the "street-level bureaucrat" with informal discretion using predominantly managerial practices, (3) the "bureau-professional" with a predominance of formal discretion, using mainly professional practices, and (4) the "paternalistic professional" with informal discretion, using professionalism mainly in the form of user empowerment (see Figure 2.3 bellow for more details).

In some countries, line workers providing public services are social workers (e.g., Evans & Harris, 2004; Evans, 2011, 2015, 2016; Pascoe, Waterhouse-Bradley & McGinn, 2023; Ballart & Ripoll, 2024; Murugan, Bender & Berg-Weger, 2025). They are often representatives of the above-mentioned type of "bureau-professional" or "paternalistic

professional". They are characterised by the use of professional judgment and traditional social work skills, such as casework and assessment, because the current design and delivery of services at the line level require it. Only exceptionally do they hold the type of "practitioner" who follows rules rather than codes of ethics and ethical behaviour (for more details, see Ellis 2011, 2014; cf. van Berkel, Caswell, Kupka & Larsen, 2017; Hupe & Evans, 2020; Lavee & Cohen, 2025)[40].

Figure 2.3 A taxonomy of frontline discretion



Source: Ellis (2011)

The way discretion is used during policy implementation, which influences its outcomes, is significantly shaped by its scope. This fact was confirmed by Tummers and Bekkers (2014), who were the first to attempt to create and empirically test a ***"theoretical framework regarding effects of discretion" based on the hypothesis that a certain "degree of discretion" influences the perception of "client meaningfulness" by workers, which in turn increases workers' "willingness to implement the policy"*** (Hill & Hupe, 2009;

[40] An example is research in public adult social care settings in the UK by Ellis et al (1999), which identified three main types of social workers: (i) "gatekeeper practitioners" who are assessors of client eligibility, (ii) "health-focused professionals" and (iii) "specialist professionals" who focus on sensory and physical disabilities and learning disabilities.

Lipsky, 1980, 2010). It can be assumed that workers are usually interested in influencing their clients' lives (Maynard, Moody, and Musheno, 2000). The resulting findings showed that line workers' discretion affects policy implementation in two ways: (i) it affects "client meaningfulness" because workers are better able to adapt their decisions and the procedures they must follow to the specific situations and needs of clients and (ii) when workers find that their work is meaningful to clients, they are strongly motivated to implement the policy and therefore distinguish clients according to those for whom their work is meaningful and those for whom it is not. These findings have also been confirmed by more recent studies (e.g., Edlins, 2021; Hassan et al., 2023a; Knox & Arshed, 2023; Xing & Xing, 2023; Tummers, Steijn & Bekkers, 2025).

At the same time, ***the same type of line worker may have different experiences regarding the extent and manner of discretion used when implementing identical policies***. The reasons may be that (i) they possess more knowledge about the rules including loopholes in the rules, (ii) their organisation implements the policy often differently than other organisations, (iii) they have a better relationship with their manager which enables them to adjust the policy to working conditions, or (iv) the personality of the bureaucrat is more rule-following or rebellious (Brehm & Hamilton, 1996; Prottas, 1979; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014; Pedersen & Pors, 2023; Knox & Arshed, 2024).

For the reasons mentioned above, the relationship between managers and line workers is significant, as discussed in the following subchapter. ***The personality of the line worker is also important, as it is the source of his motivation to exercise the discretion available to him in ways that provide services to various recipient groups*** (DeHart-Davis, 2007; Aarøe et al., 2021; Dufault et al., 2023; Callen et al., 2025). In addition, the personality of the line worker, together with organisational factors, creates a specific "mindframe" for the worker, which allows him, for example, to deal with the so-called "paradox of rules", which consists in imposing conflicting obligations on the worker (Źgur, 2023). In this context, Evans (2014) suggests investigating the motives of line bureaucrats through the concept of "Moral Economy," which combines their commitments and interests within a specific context. Specifically, according to Evans, these commitments and interests can occur along the moral axis of "altruism," motivated by "universalistic morality," versus "self-serving" action, motivated by "economic self-interest." However, when exercising

discretion, line workers may face their own or other related problems, with differing understandings and analyses of the problem and various ideas about appropriate responses and interventions (Evans & Hardy, 2010). For this reason, it is possible to understand line practices especially if it is ascertained (i) what the problems and commitments of the practitioners are, (ii) how they perceive the need, (iii) how they characterize the problem, and (iv) how they view the balance that needs to be achieved between social and individual responsibility (Evans, 2014).

Use of Discretion by Line Bureaucrats in the Process of Providing Public Services when Interacting with Clients

In our view, the concept of "street-level bureaucracy" can be formulated as a simple formula corresponding to the scheme in which "line workers of state organisations interact with citizens to whom they provide public services". The process of interaction between line workers and the users of the services they provide is the focus of researchers studying implementation. In the course of these interactions, line bureaucrats exercise the discretion they have at their disposal (Hupe & Hill, 2016), and with their decisions made in this discretionary space, they can significantly influence the lives of users of the services they provide (e.g., Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, 2022). For this reason, careful research is often conducted into how bureaucrats exercise their discretion (e.g., Goodsell, 1976; Prottas, 1979) or what processes occur during their interaction with clients (for more details, see Keulemans & de Walle, 2020a; Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022a; Carnochan, Das & Austin, 2023; Halling & Petersen, 2024).

In previous research on interactions between line workers and clients, several recurring themes have emerged, representing individual, often overlapping ***phases of the service-providing process undertaken by line workers for various groups of citizens***. They most often concern the (i) "obtaining information about clients", (ii) "clients' evaluation and categorisation", and (iii) "line workers' decision-making about what services to provide". We will discuss these topics in more detail below. They usually examine not only how a given phase of the service provision process unfolds, but also which types of workers, groups of workers, and clients interact, and, in particular, which factors may influence the individual phases of this process.

As has been stated many times before, line workers communicate directly with citizens during their work and make thus "people processing" within the discretion available to them, i.e., they assess individual clients as individuals endowed with unique personalities, life stories and circumstances and treat them according to standard criteria, "as if they fit standardized definitions of units consigned to specific bureaucratic slots " (Lipsky, 1980, p. 59; also Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977; Soss, Fording & Schram, 2011).

A key process of client processing is ***categorization of clients*** (Lipsky, 1980; Jilke & Tummers, 2018), which occurs during the interaction between workers and clients, mainly based on the assessment of (i) their "eligibility" or "merit", (ii) whether they are considered "desirable" or "undesirable", or (iii) according to the worker's perceived need (for more details, see Kroeger, 1975; Hasenfeld & Steinmetz, 1981; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, 2022; Keulemans & de Walle, 2020b; Lotta & Kirschbaum, 2021; Räsänen, Raitakari & Juhila, 2024; Vogel et al., 2025).

When distinguishing between individual clients and categorising them, which represents the ***client evaluation process***, line workers are often significantly influenced by the values, norms, and cultural elements of the different types of social groups to which they belong (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, 2012, 2022; Lotta & Pires, 2019; Bjørnholt et al., 2025). At the same time, they are influenced by individual experiences of interaction with a particular user, during which a more or less reciprocal relationship is formed (Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2018)[41]. During interactions, the focus is often primarily on (i) observable characteristics of clients, e.g., skin colour, gender, clothing, behaviour, place of residence, which represent signals based on which workers (ii) create expectations about unobservable characteristics of clients, e.g., level of education, trustworthiness and based on which they subsequently (iii) assign individual clients to the relevant ethnic or status social group, (iv) from which they expect a specific behaviour, activities, or performance, e.g., groups with low social status, characterized by low education and non-majority ethnicity can expect lower performance and cooperation (for more details, see e.g., Prottas, 1979; Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, 2022; Dubois, 2010; Harrits & Møller, 2014; Epp, Maynard-Moody & Haider-Markel, 2014; Raaphorst &

[41] According to Raaphorst and Groeneveld (2018), this relationship is significantly influenced by workers' cultural beliefs about what is fair and normal, workers' expectations of the actions and behaviour of different groups (social categories) of clients, and the actual actions and behaviour of these groups.

Groeneveld, 2018; Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b; Fekjær, Øverbye & Terum, 2023; Bell & Jilke, 2024).

Client categorisation is, in fact, a moral process that involves considering how to apply rules, procedures, and policies, and to whom to provide or withhold services (Lotta & Pires, 2019). This balancing act commonly results in stereotypes[42] and prejudices[43] (Brodkin & Majmundar, 2010; Harrits & Møller, 2014; Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2018; Visser, de Koster & van Buuren, 2024), which results in different actions for different clients depending on how their "need", "merit" or "social contribution/value" is perceived (Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Goodsell, 1981; Brehm & Gates, 1999; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, 2022; Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010; Hill, 2006; Cheng & Wong, 2013; Borrelli, 2022; Schnapp, 2024). The result is often ***conscious or unconscious favouritism of some clients over others*** (Meier & Nicholos-Crotty, 2006; Atkins, Fertig & Wilkins, 2014; Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2019; Gershogern & Cohen, 2023). Greater empathy in meeting clients' needs and shared values, based on race, ethnicity, and/or gender, may increase the likelihood of rule violations by line workers acting on behalf of clients (Gofen, Sella & Gassner, 2019; Sweeting, 2022; Mussagulova, 2026).

Workers' decision-making and the resulting decisions about how to approach different clients and what services to provide them are significantly influenced by the categories in which clients are classified (e.g., Oberfield, 2014; Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2017; Lotta & Kirschbaum, 2021; Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b; Ranerup & Svensson, 2023). This process results from evaluating available information about clients. Existing studies in this context have clearly demonstrated that line workers adopt positive or negative

[42] An example of stereotyping is the so-called "double standards theory", which is based on the distinction between standards of competence and incompetence. Specifically, this theory states that if the performance of citizens with lower social status exceeds expectations for workers, this discrepancy will lead workers to seek evidence that this performance is indeed the result of citizens' competence. They will use stricter evaluation criteria and standards. Conversely, if high-status clients meet expectations of high performance, workers will relax their evaluation criteria. According to this theory, workers are more lenient towards clients from groups with higher social status (non-manual workers and university graduates) than towards clients from groups with lower status (people at risk of housing exclusion and people with low education) when they are found to have failed (e.g., poor accounting by tax officials). On the other hand, stricter standards may be applied to high-status individuals (e.g., a mayor) than to low-status individuals (e.g., a shoemaker entrepreneur), depending on the group to which entrepreneurs are classified (Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2018).

[43] For example, Lineberry (1977) assumes, through the "underclass hypothesis," that clients who are perceived by bureaucrats as less suitable or less desirable (e.g., minorities and the poor) are discriminated against both during and after service provision.

attitudes towards clients based on their aggregate evaluation of cognitive, affective, and behavioural information about them (Keulemans & de Walle, 2020a; Procter et al., 2022; Bakkeli, 2023a).

However, not all line bureaucrats evaluate the same information about clients or respond to them in the same way (Van de Walle & Lahat, 2016). They may differ in their general orientations towards clients. In this context, for example, (i) "client-oriented bureaucrats" have been identified, who use greater discretion in favour of clients and are more willing to ignore politics to help clients (Kroeger, 1975; Hansen, Pedersen & Willems, 2025) and (ii) "bureaucrats with 'a condemnatory moralistic view of clients", who are more inclined to respond to clients in a repressive manner (Stone, 1981; for more details, see Keulemans & de Walle, 2020b; Alecu, Sadeghi & Terum, 2025).

2.2.4 Component/Theme 4 – The Role and Influence of Managers on Line Bureaucrats

The level of discretion available to line workers and the way it is used during the implementation of public policy are, to varying degrees, influenced by their superior managers. For this reason, even Lipsky, in his concept of "street-level bureaucracy", could not ignore their role and influence on street-level workers and the services they provide. In his reflections and research, he specifically addressed the relationship between "managers" and "line bureaucrats", whom he considered to be ***categorically different and mutually contradictory employees*** (see Lipsky, 1971, 1976, 1980/2010, 1991). While he perceived line bureaucrats as actors who focus on *activities aligned with their own preferences and only on those goals of the organisation* supported by significant sanctions, he perceived managers as actors who are fully committed to managing the organisation. They aim to narrow ***the gap between line workers' performance and policy-makers' desired outcomes***, which are also the agency's goals, through available control mechanisms (Evans, 2016a). According to Lipsky, managers focus on managing line workers' goals while minimising their autonomy, primarily through "performance measures" used to compare the outputs of their work and "eligibility criteria" for citizens' access to services.

Lipsky thus perceived managers as a homogeneous group of actors. However, he ignored their influence and role as political actors, so-called "discretionary decision-making agents", who have their own political agenda and understanding of the policy-making

process and implementation in government organisations providing public services (Evans 2011, 2016). Their work consists of (i) making policy decisions, (ii) setting priorities, (iii) interpreting requirements, and (iv) allocating resources (Harris, 2003; Evans, 2015a, 2016). Modern managers can thus be considered key organisational actors who should determine policy goals and actively strive to implement them (Kirkpatrick et al., 2005; Hicklin & Godwin, 2009; Novato, Najberg & Lotta, 2020; Seo et al., 2025).

The view of managers as political actors has grown in recent decades. This is a consequence of the fact that the functioning of organisations providing public services in many countries is significantly influenced by the introduction of "strategic management", which focuses on maximising organisational performance, services, and profits (as noted in the introduction to this thesis). Contemporary managers in many countries of the world use management and control practices to a greater or lesser extent, mainly focused on (i) controlling expenditure and (ii) meeting performance targets, through which they influence line workers and the way they implement policy and thus the resulting form of services provided to citizens. Managers implement these practices using procedural manuals. These relate to both the management of the process of allocating line workers' resources to clients based on demand criteria, and the methods for recording information to monitor line workers' performance indicators (Evans, 2011; Felício, Samagaio & Rodrigues, 2021; Raaphorst, 2024). The successful implementation and use of these practices are linked to the idea of "managerialism", the central element of which is the notion of the actively controlling manager and his requirement that the cost of services be taken into account in professional judgment (Newman & Clarke, 1997).

Previous research aimed at assessing the impact of implementing the above-mentioned strategic management principles on the discretion and activities of line workers has yielded contradictory findings, which can be explained by different institutional contexts of the implemented policies (for more details, see e.g., Andreotti, Coletto & Rio, 2023; Lee & Park, 2025). On the one hand, many studies have demonstrated ***limited influence of managers on the activities of line workers***, where managers often failed to significantly limit their discretion[44] (e.g., Brehm & Gates, 1999; Langbein & Jorstad, 2004;

[44] For example, research conducted by Evans (2010a,b) in the UK shows that even though managers used assertive techniques to manage line workers, especially by checking compliance with detailed rules, and at

Riccucci et al., 2004; Riccucci, 2005; Ellis, 2007; Newton & Browne, 2008; Evans, 2009; 2010a, b, 2016a; Van der Hoek & Kuipers, 2024). Other studies, by contrast, have found a ***greater influence of managers on line workers***. This mainly concerned the impact (i) on the perception of the importance of performance monitoring by line workers (May & Winter, 2009; van Berkel & van der Aa, 2025), (ii) on the activation of their professional knowledge and abilities to manage moral dilemmas and emotional stress (Møller & Grøn, 2023), (iii) on the professionalism of their work processes (Alonso de Andrade & Pekkola, 2024) including the support of their creativity (Bashir & Masood, 2024) or, conversely, (iv) on the possibility of "squeezing the discretion" of line workers by monitoring performance indicators, thereby limiting their opportunities to respond to the real needs of clients (Lindhorst & Padgett, 2005; Jewell, 2007; Brodkin 2011a, 2013, 2015, cf. Evans, 2020; Sauermann, 2023).

The limited influence of politicians and managers on achieving policy goals may stem from a deeper understanding of these goals, greater professional knowledge, and stronger political predispositions among line workers, as demonstrated by May and Winter (2009) in their study of the implementation of employment policy reform in Denmark. Conversely, the greater influence of managers on line workers may be influenced in particular by (i) the role that the manager performs and (ii) his relationship with line workers. This applies in particular to “line managers”, the immediate superiors of line workers, rather than “senior managers”, who, like line workers, can exercise relatively extensive discretion and contribute to the existence of the implementation gap[45]. This is even though the main task of all types of managers and policy makers should be, according to Zacka (2017), to achieve a “delicate equilibrium” between the normative pressures to which line workers are exposed. Managers' activities should therefore not limit line workers' discretion but create conditions in which they can exercise it in a reasonable, responsible, and professional manner (van Berkel, 2020; Møller & Grøn, 2023; O´Brien, 2025).

the same time limited resources for the services provided, line workers continued to exercise their professional judgment/discretion to a large extent independently of managers.

[45] Senior managers can create working conditions that lead to confusion, inconsistent policy implementation, and under-resourcing. This is particularly likely in countries where New Public Management principles have been introduced into public administration, transforming senior managers from their “administrative” role into one of “business-like values”. They achieve this by creating a coherent system of control that involves establishing extensive and effective procedures, budgets, and supervision of subordinate line workers, resulting in a “well-oiled, business-like public policy delivery machine” (Evans, 2012, 2016a).

The importance of ***managers' role and their potential to influence line workers' policy implementation without conflict*** lies in their ability to shape the context in which line workers exercise discretion. At the same time, they have the opportunity to create a congruent relationship with line workers. Managers in these situations can be characterized by two key specificities: (i) they can perform the role not only of managers, but also of professionals who have the same professional knowledge as line workers (Henderson & Seden, 2003; Evans, 2011; Rosenbloom, Kravchuk & Clerkin, 2022; Huang & Villadsen, 2023) and therefore share the common idea of professional freedom that they provide to line workers (Evans, 2011), and (ii) they are actors with significant discretion that allows them to modify the decisions of senior managers who have close ties to politicians, make strategic decisions in line organisations and can indirectly make the performance of line workers more difficult (Evans, 2016). Managers can also (iii) strengthen their relationship with line workers, for example, by involving them in decision-making processes, communicating with them, and providing them with feedback through supervision. They thus significantly influence how workers understand policy, its objectives, and its implementation (for more details, see Henderson & Pandey, 2013). Existing studies in this context show that ***many line managers make efforts to protect their subordinate line workers' autonomy from external control mechanisms*.** These are mainly active and passive ways of resisting controls from the centre of the state in an attempt to protect discretion at the level of middle and line management (Bannink, Six & Wijk, 2015; Hupe & van Kooten, 2015; Evans, 2015a; Claeys, Van den Broeck, Houkes & de Rijk, 2024). At the same time, a significant influence of line managers on the provision of public services has been demonstrated in the implementation of public reforms through the so-called "situation work". Within this framework, they adapt managerial activities to situational contingencies that align with the goals of the reforms and the interests and expectations of workers, clients, and local partners (Klemsdal, Andreassen & Breit, 2022; Gofen, Meza & Moreno-Jaimes, 2024).

In countries where greater management and control of line workers are promoted through various methods and practices, failures often occur. Available studies show the following findings in particular (Schuppan, 2015; Buffat, Hill & Hupe, 2015; Mergel, Dickinson, Stenvall & Gasco, 2023; Nordesjö, Ulmestig & Scaramuzzino, 2023; Alshallaqi &

Al-Mamary, 2024; Klijn, 2024; Verhoest et al., 2024; Qin & Christensen, 2025; Trein, Presset & Vagionaki, 2025):

- ***Effective top-down control of line workers is difficult*** due to high complexity and ambiguity;
- ***The introduction of information and communication technologies, including digitalised automated decision-making, reduces the administrative burden, but is inefficient***, especially in documenting subjective work activities, and does not improve managerial control. Moreover, the combination of bureaucratic, professional, and managerial controls creates tensions and conflicts between task-related and externally imposed mechanisms;
- The increasing hybridity of modern control of line-level practices, which consists in the use of mixed or combined control mechanisms, leads to line bureaucrats being held accountable in terms of acting in accordance with rules, performance indicators, and as experts/professionals. However, ***the New Public Management or professional standards do not eliminate the use of bureaucratic modes of control***, and line organisations are often transformed into hybrid types, creating new dilemmas and tensions; and
- ***Control mechanisms are closely linked to certain types of tasks performed*** when some are monitored through bureaucratic procedures, others through managerial or professional standards, with the distinction being made mainly between standardised and non-standardised work.

2.2.5 Component/Theme 5 – Modes of Providing Public Services: Use of Bureaucratic, Professional, Bureau-Professional and Managerial Practices

From the information presented so far, it follows that line practices take place in a complex environment characterised by the intersection of rules, cultural expectations, and situational factors. In practice, this is manifested in the fact that *the behaviour of line workers* that leads to a particular way of providing public services is influenced not only by (i) “legislative rules”, but also (ii) “organisational and employee culture” (Sandfort, 2000; Riccucci, 2005; Cohen, 2018; Jacobsson, Wallinder & Seing, 2020; Žgur, 2023; Bijalwan et al., 2024; Perry & Gupta, 2025) and at the same time (iii) “extra-organisational sources of

influence", which include, among others, direct and indirect relationships with political representatives (May & Winter, 2007; Blom-Hansen et al., 2018; Sery & Weiss-Gal, 2022; Weiss-Gal & Gal, 2025). These facts create ***a dilemma for line workers between flexibility and uniformity in their approach to solving citizens' problems*** (Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010; cf. Rivera & Knox, 2022; Hansen, 2024).

In this context, in our opinion, it is possible to theoretically distinguish the following empirically identifiable ***ways of behaviour that the same line worker can use*** in different phases of the process of providing services to citizens in various work contexts and situations (cf. Horák & Horáková, 2009a; Evans, 2014; Chang, 2022; Virani & Wal, 2023; Kamkhaji & Radaelli, 2025):

- ***"Bureaucratic, impersonal behaviour"***, which is characterised by compliance with pre-established legislative and organisational rules and norms;
- ***"Professional, individualised behaviour focused on the client's life situation"***, which usually consists of compliance with the norms of a specific profession or professions, although this may not be a condition, which may be in contradiction with legislative rules and organisational rules;
- ***"Bureau-professional behaviour"***, which combines both of the above-mentioned types of behaviour depending on the situation being solved and the kind of client; and
- ***"Managerial behaviour"***, which consists of the worker following economic priorities.

In the literature on street-level bureaucracy, the provision of public services has long been associated with professionalism, a factor that Lipsky did not adequately address, especially its role and influence on the relationship between managers and line workers (Evans, 2011, 2016a). Some forms of service provision require ***flexibility and the adaptation of general rules to specific situations***, which is enabled by the use of "professional practices" (Meyers & Nielsen, 2012). However, what is "professionalism", or rather, what are the characteristics of "professional practices" used in the provision of not only public services?

In the existing literature and research studies, it is possible to identify ***two approaches to the perception of "professional practices"***, which we will discuss in more detail below:

(i) as "practising a profession" primarily among social workers in comparison with non-social workers or workers of other professions[46], or (ii) as "practising professionalism", where professionalism is perceived as a phenomenon of practice (for more details, see van Berkel et al., 2022; cf. Howe, 2023; Miller, 2024)[47].

Providing Public Services as "Practising a Profession"

The „practising a profession“ perspective assumes that line workers are members of a particular profession and therefore provide services in accordance with their professional status. This significantly affects their discretion, as it shapes the extent of professional freedom exercised and signifies a commitment to the profession's values (Freidson, 2001; Evetts, 2002; Noon & Blyton, 2002; Knill, Steinebach & Fernández-i-Marín, 2025; Koop, 2025). Key characteristics of „professionalism“ in this perspective can be considered to be (i) an ideology focused on the well-being of service users rather than economic priorities and (ii) a certain degree of control over its own work (Freidson, 2001).

The provision of professional services by line workers as members of a particular profession is ensured by the profession's institutionalisation in society[48]. Historically, there has been a shift in the definition and perception of professionalism in relation to the definition of the profession, which is represented by the following ***four successive streams of schools that view the process of professionalisation differently*** (for more details, see

[46] These studies focus on the role of the social work profession, the extent to which work ethics and values correspond to activation policies and their goals (Hasenfeld, 1999), or by comparing the activation practices of social workers with non-social workers or other professionals (Sadeghi & Fekjær, 2018; van Berkel & Knies, 2018).

[47] These include studies that use a “prescriptive approach” and assume that activation work should be organised and managed in the same way as professional work, because the goals of activation policy change people (Hasenfeld, 2010), and that services need to be personalised due to the heterogeneity of target groups (Rice, Fuertes & Monticelli, 2018). They also include studies that use a “descriptive approach” and examine the extent to which activation workers enact professionalism, taking into account that activation workers differ in their views of clients (Eikenaar, Rijk & Meershoek, 2016), or that use limited research knowledge (Bolhaar, Ketel & Klaauw, 2020) and statistical tools (Behncke et al., 2007) in their decision-making, even though they are clearly professional practices (Ponnert & Svensson, 2018).

[48] In this context, “dimensions of professionalisation” can be distinguished, which include (i) public recognition of professional status, (ii) professional monopoly on specific types of work secured by law, (iii) regulation of the profession, which requires extensive autonomy, (iv) specific knowledge and securing its development, (v) high-quality standard vocational education and continuing education, (vi) effective professional organisations, (vii) codified ethical standards, and (viii) social prestige and remuneration (Harrits, 2019).

Matoušek, Navrátil & Matulayová, 2019; Matulayová, Navrátil, Matoušek & Pazlarová, 2021):

- ***"School of attributes"*** in the 1950s focused on defining the characteristics of a profession, the essence of which is the transmission, practice, standardisation, and control of skills supported by relevant knowledge[49];
- ***"Functional school"*** in the 1960s, which considered the legitimacy of professions in terms of their function to respond to social needs[50];
- ***"Conflictual school"*** in the 1970s, which focused on the negative aspects of the profession represented by actors competing for resources and fighting for power[51]; and
- ***"Reflexive approach"*** from the 1980s to the present, based on the search for and application of relevant practices and methods of the profession[52].

Over the past decades, the role of professionalism for line workers has undergone significant changes due to demands related to the increasing influence of managerialism, bureaucratization and consumerism, which is by some authors interpreted as (i) "de-professionalization" and by others as (ii) "re-professionalization" (Abbott, 1988; Evetts, 2003; Exworthy & Halford, 1999; Noordegraaf, 2011; van Berkel & van der Aa, 2012; Ponnert & Svensson, 2018; Malin, 2020; Zhang & Liu, 2021; Alamaa, Hall & Löfgren, 2025; Bacon, Hebenton & McCann, 2025). Proponents of "de-professionalisation" argue that increased state control and reduced self-regulation among line workers have led to professional standards competing with other non-professional norms, thereby influencing

[49] The characteristics of a profession include (i) a set of skills supported by a systematic knowledge base, (ii) the presence of a long-term phase of formal training, (iii) licensing as a prerequisite for practicing the profession, (iv) a code of ethics regulating professional ethics, and (v) the existence of a formal professional association (Greenwood, 1957).

[50] Professions are seen as useful institutions necessary for the survival of society because they respond to existing social needs and serve as intermediaries between man and society (Parsons, 1939).

[51] The focus is on the power aspects of the profession and conflicts of interest, as professions are perceived as elites striving for a privileged position, competing for customers, resources, and wanting to control their territory, thus representing an institution of oppression pursuing profit rather than altruism (Illich, 1970, 1977).

[52] It focuses on the dialectics of theory/general and practice/concrete, on negotiating solutions in a given situation through dialogue, on effective decision-making, while simultaneously applying knowledge, practical skills, experience, and intuition, and the ability to perceive context and consequences and work in uncertainty (Schön, 1984, 1987).

their decision-making. Proponents of "re-professionalisation", on the other hand, argue that the pressures mentioned above need not be perceived as threatening professional performance, as professional standards have often adapted to them.

Public Service Delivery as "Practising Professionalism"

The above-mentioned changes have led to the current view of the professionalism of line workers in public administration as “practising professionalism” rather than “practising a profession”, as ***line workers usually represent heterogeneous groups of people from different professions*** (van Berkel, van der Aa & van Gestel, 2010; Caswell, Kupka, Larsen & van Berkel, 2017; Van Berkel & Knies, 2018; Worthington & Hays, 2022; Ding & Riccucci, 2023). The practising professionalism in working with clients can be considered processes related to (i) acquisition, sharing and use of "knowledge" to provide services, (ii) which are based on a "partnership" between workers and clients, (iii) use "innovation" and "collaboration" with internal and external partners, (iv) are carried out in accordance with "profiling instruments to diagnose clients" and (v) where workers "feel responsible" for their actions towards superiors, colleagues and clients (for more details see van Berkel, de Vries & van der Aa, 2020; van Berkel et al., 2022)[53].

The need for a professional approach is often linked to ***the idea that “being professional” is a key logic of individualised work***, reflecting the specific problems and needs of different groups of citizens who use public services. Professional line workers are expected to (i) provide individualised “tailor-made services” to individual citizens, (ii) use “casework methods” to individually solve complex problems, and (iii) focus on “changing

[53] “Practising professionalism” was conceptualized by van Berkel et al. (2021) using the following eight dimensions, of which the first three dimensions are knowledge-oriented and the remaining five dimensions are service-oriented: (i) knowledge acquisition (education and professional training, or acquiring and updating academic or research knowledge about activation services and interventions), (ii) knowledge sharing (collaborating with others to solve problems, develop new ideas, and implement policies and procedures), (iii) knowledge use (conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in combination with professional expertise and client preferences and values when making decisions about services provided to individual clients), (iv) innovation (deliberately introducing or utilizing new ideas, products, processes, and procedures into one's work role, workplace, or organisation), (v) client-centred practice (a professional-client relationship characterized by partnership, respect for the client, facilitation of choice, and client involvement in decision-making), (vi) collaboration (cooperating in service delivery processes with relevant internal and external stakeholders), (vii) accountability (a feeling of obligation to explain or justify one's behaviour to a significant other – political authorities and superiors, peers and colleagues, and clients), and (viii) methodical work (working in accordance with regulations/individual action plan based on diagnosis).

people´s situation, behaviour and attitudes" (for more details, see van Berkel & van der Aa, 2012)[54].

A professional approach is thus not ensured by line workers' affiliation to a particular profession, as evidenced, for example, by the lack of uniform, specific professional knowledge among activation workers implementing employment policy in most countries worldwide. On the contrary, the professional approach of these workers is often associated with the requirement of relevant competencies and skills, including, for example, the ability to manage communication processes and client relations, as well as a tendency to psychologize activation work (Hagelund, 2016).

As noted repeatedly, line workers require discretion to apply their expertise. However, granting sufficient autonomy to line workers does not automatically lead to individualised service provision grounded in professional practice. This may be because workers handle autonomy differently, due to ***the absence of general professional standards***. Most often, professional service provision is limited by (i) "policy regulations", (ii) "bureaucratic work organisation" or (iii) "orders of managers" that lead to the bureaucratisation of their work procedures (Brodkin, 2007; Hasenfeld, 1999; Jewell, 2007; Dias & Maynard-Moody, 2006; Lipsky, 2023). Bureaucratic work organisation most often consists of paperwork and the use of tools to standardise work procedures, e.g., client profiling. On the other hand, these tools can support workers' professional decision-making (van Berkel & van der Aa, 2012).

In other words, the professional delivery of services by line workers, and thus their autonomy, is often influenced by ***political and organisational pressures***, including standardisation, differentiation, and centralised regulation of their work processes (Jewell, 2007; Thorén, 2008; Lee, 2024). Some tasks can thus be performed by the same worker, either professionally or bureaucratically; for example, monitoring external activation programs in employment policy and performing administrative activities can be done bureaucratically. On the other hand, they can be interpreted as part of professional work, as they support effective case management (van Berkel & van der Aa, 2012).

[54] An example of a professional approach is the 'activation work' of welfare-to-work workers, which consists of providing services aimed at supporting the reintegration into the labour market of unemployed and benefit-dependent people, who often face complex and difficult-to-solve problems that require expertise and individualised attention, and the use of technologies that have the potential to influence their characteristics and abilities (Clarke & Newman, 1997; Vinzant & Crothers, 1998).

2.3 The Current Contributions of Lipsky's Theory of "Street-Level Bureaucracy" to Understanding Public Policy Implementation and a Summary of Key Findings

Despite the persistent problems that research on policy implementation at the line level has so far failed to address, according to Hupe et al. (2015, pp. 9-11), there are the following obvious ***types of problems that Lipsky's concept of "street-level bureaucracy" successfully addresses***:

- ***„Theoretical problem"*** – it provides an understanding of the multi-layered process of policy-making, in which the line bureaucrat is a distinct policy-maker with a relatively high degree of discretion and autonomy from organisational powers and with significant freedom to determine the nature, scope, and quality of services provided and sanctions. Their decisions, routines, and procedures for managing uncertainty and work pressures shape the public policies they implement, and, thus, the everyday practice of governance in contact with citizens is monitored.
- ***"Methodological problem"*** – it opens the "black box" of what actually happens in implementing organisations. The use of observation and interview methods allows us to understand the problems faced by line bureaucrats, arising from the structure of their work.
- ***"Programmatic problem"*** – this concept represents a street-level bureaucracy "approach" or "framework" that allows us to identify both common elements of the employment of line bureaucrats and which features of the "people-processing process" are standard and which are unique in different occupational milieus, thus allowing comparisons across service areas.
- ***"Normative/policy problem"*** – it notices the work circumstances in which officials perform their tasks and thus how socially engaged they are, and the relationship between their discretionary decisions and, most often, the unequal treatment of citizens, i.e., whether they use strategies of alienation, attack, or support in service delivery.

The advantage of the concept of "street-level bureaucracy" is that it can be analytically framed by the simple formulation mentioned above: "line workers of state organisations interact with citizens to whom they provide public services within specific

policies". Understanding how and with what results line workers can implement a given policy, and in what form the resulting public services will take, still requires us to reflect on a relatively large number of factors that can directly or indirectly influence this process in specific work situations. Here we encounter the "too many variables problem," which, however, is relatively limited due to the "framing" of the concept of line bureaucracy.

To understand policy implementation at the line level, it is necessary to further elaborate on the above simple formula so that it can be used for empirical research, with the following in mind – there are different types of (i) “line bureaucrats” who can play various roles during public policy implementation, (ii) “line organisations” that can play different roles in public policy/policy implementation, (iii) “organisational environments” within these line organisations, (iv) “government arrangements” of which line organisations are a part, (v) “public and social policies” whose objectives can be more or less clearly formulated, and (vi) different “groups of citizens” to whom public policy is provided and who are forced to solve various problems more or less voluntarily through the services offered by line workers.

To understand the formulation mentioned above and test it empirically, it is necessary to identify all potential factors that may, or actually do, influence *it in the existing literature and research studies.* We have sought to achieve this goal by creating an “Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers”, presented in Chapter 4. In the following chapter, we focus in greater detail on the most important selected approaches for analysing public policy implementation at the line level that experts in this field have used to date. More specifically, we will discuss possible perspectives and the most important analytical tools developed and used to date for this type of analysis.

Chapter 3

POSSIBILITIES FOR ANALYZING PUBLIC POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AT THE STREET LEVEL: PERSPECTIVES AND SELECTED CONCEPTUAL TOOLS

In this chapter, we examine the potential for analytical insight and methodological investigation of public policy implementation at the line level using selected models and frameworks. These include factors that influence the behaviour and actions of line bureaucrats and, thus, the way they provide public services to different groups of citizens, with the potential to influence the regional and social development of a given locality. We structure the text into three subchapters. In the first, we address possible *perspectives for analysing public policy implementation by line bureaucrats, including micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, and the various contexts appropriate for such analysis* at the line level. In particular, the context of policy, governance, implementing organisations, and the profession of line workers (subchapter 3.1). Subsequently, we present *selected conceptual tools, so-called "models" and "frameworks", created for the needs of analysing public policy implementation* (subchapter 3.2), which we used as inspiration and key sources of information to construct our "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers", which we present in the following chapter 4.

The information contained in this chapter should allow you to answer the following questions:

- ***"From what levels is it possible to analyse public policy implementation at the line level and what are the shortcomings of existing analyses of street-level bureaucracy?"***
- ***"Which institutional contexts directly or indirectly influence the implementation of public policy by line workers?"***
- ***"What are the current most important conceptual tools that can be used for identification and examination of variables influencing the implementation of public policy by street-level bureaucrats?"*** [55]

[55] Specifically, we present the following "frameworks" and "models": (i) the "Multiple Governance Framework" and the perspective of policy implementation as "operational governance" (Hill & Hupe, 2002; 2006; 2009), (ii) the "General Analytical Framework" to examine the influence of the organisational environment on the behaviour of line workers (Jewel & Glaser, 2006), (iii) the "Micro-Institutional Model of Policy Implementation" (Rice, 2012), (iv) the "Theoretical Framework to Analyse the Organisational Causes

- ***"What aspects of public policy implementation do the presented conceptual tools focus on, and how can they be a source of inspiration for the creation of our own analytical tool capable of identifying key factors influencing the implementation of public policy by street-level bureaucrats?"***

3.1 Possible Perspectives for Analysis of Public Policy Implementation by Line Bureaucrats: Levels and Contexts

3.1.1 Levels of Analysis of Public Policy Implementation at the Street Level

As outlined in some detail in the previous chapter, which focused on explaining the concept of "street-level bureaucracy," street-level implementation of public policy is carried out (i) by individuals of various professions most often named as "street-level bureaucrats" or "line workers" (ii) through direct "interactions" with different types of clients (iii) in diverse "organisational environments" characterized by specific settings, and (iv) in different "geographical areas" (e.g., Gofen, Sella & Gassner, 2019; Hupe, Hill & Buffat, 2015a; Hupe, 2019a,b; Hupe & Hill, 2019; Evans, 2020; Hill & Hupe, 2021; Cohen, 2023; Jacobsson & Johansson, 2025).

In view of this, according to Gofen, Sella, and Gassner (2019), the implementation of public and social policies at the line level can be analysed from *three perspectives: micro-, meso-, and macro-.* These are intertwined, focus on different variables, and can be used with diverse research designs.

In studies using ***"micro-level analyses"***, the unit of research is the "interaction" of line workers with clients, and they aim to identify differences in these "interactions" and between "individual workers". Analyses focusing on "interactions" examine how workers, who are perceived as "citizen-agents" (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000, 2003, 2022), manage the paradoxical expectation that they should treat all clients equally while responding appropriately to individual clients, and the outcomes of these interactions. The focus here is on the use of coping mechanisms by workers when dealing with different types of clients (Tummers et al., 2015) (see Chapter 2.1.3 for more details). In the second type of these analyses, the subject of research is an individual "line worker", often a

of Administrative Burden" (Peters, 2012) and (v) the "Formal Model of Street-Level Bureaucracy" (Chang, 2021).

member of a particular profession, who is treated as a "state-agent" responsible for implementing formal policy decisions (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000, 2003, 2022). Researchers here focus on the "gap" (May & Winter, 2009) or "divergence" from formal guidelines (Brodkin, 2003; Gofen, 2014; Thomann, Maxia & Egge, 2023), because line workers often manage difficult working conditions through informal practices that differ from those recognized by policy-makers and/or often by managers in the organisation (Brodkin, 2011a; Zacka, 2017; Evans, 2020) (see Chapter 1.1.2 for more details).

In ***"meso-level analyses",*** the focus is usually on the "organisation", the "implemented policy", and/or the "profession". (i) Studies of "organisations" in which policy is implemented are usually based on the assumption that they are "the locus of organisational initiative", where "independent performance of tasks occurs" and where "direct supervision is difficult" (Smith, 1965). The focus here is on a range of issues that could significantly influence line workers' implementation activities. Most commonly, these include "insufficient resources", "formal and informal organisational routines", "degree of organisational centralisation", "inter-organisational characteristics", "inter-organisational management styles", and "organisational networks" (e.g., Dias & Maynard-Moody, 2007; May & Winter, 2009; Keiser, 2010; Hupe & Buffat, 2014; Thomann, 2015; Destler, 2017; Lotta & Marques, 2020; Lavee, 2021; Altamimi, Liu & Jimenez, 2023; Ganeshu et al., 2024)[56]. (ii) Analyses focusing on "implemented policy" reach consistent findings, with line workers being significantly influenced primarily by the form of "formal policy", which is often ambiguous and unclear, "policy objectives", which are often insufficiently clear and consistent (Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; Sandfort, 2000; Brodkin, 2003; Gassner & Gofen, 2019; Davidovitz, Cohen & Gofen, 2021; Fowler, 2023),

[56] (i) "Insufficient resources" are related to limited sources of knowledge and information and usually lead to extensive workload, (ii) "formal and informal organisational routines" refer to formalized instructions and training, (iii) "degree of organisational centralization" indicates that formalized organisations emphasize strict adherence to written rules and procedures and impersonal actions, compared to distributed organisations, which provide more room for independent decision-making to meet the current needs of the office, (iv) "interorganisational characteristics" allow for a greater or lesser degree of setting an organisational climate that promotes employee satisfaction, provides training and supervision, (v) "interorganisational management modes" can take the form of either intensive supervision or limited discretion, or less use of control but more intensive guidance and performance measurement that promotes compliance with the rules, or they can allow line workers to "bend" the rules if their superiors approve this action, and (vi) "organisational networks" influence how discretion is exercised in an organisation, as workers tend to adapt their actions to what is already known, expected, and perceived about the actions and outcomes of other actors involved in policy implementation (Gofen, Sella & Gassner, 2019).

which causes policies to not provide clear instructions on how they should be implemented, "the degree of discretion" set by the policy, which allows workers to more or less adapt their decisions and procedures to the specific situations and needs of their clients (e.g., Riccucci, 2005; Evans, 2011, 2016), and "policy philosophy and practice", where in particular the introduction of new managerialism causes an increase in work pressures and workloads, and decisions made by workers often worsen policy outcomes for clients (Brodkin, 2007, 2011a; Diefenbach, 2009; Ellis, 2011; Soss, Fording & Schram, 2011). (iii) In research on the "profession," line workers are seen as professionals who are governed by employment or professional ideologies, which both justify and guarantee their discretionary power (Hupe & Hill, 2007; Carey & Foster, 2011; Trappenburg, Kampen & Tonkens, 2020; Cecchini & Harrits, 2022; Alonso de Andrade & Pekkola, 2024). Even though policies and rules often prevent these workers from acting in accordance with their "professional knowledge," their decisions are guided by "professional imperatives" (Haynes & Licata, 1995), "professional commitment" and "professional values," along with employee and "professional identities", lead workers to make ethical decisions that address rights, responsibilities, and obligations from a moral and value perspective (Banks, 2001; Zacka, 2019; DiBenigno, 2022; Brunetto, Xerri & Farr-Wharton, 2024).

The focus of ***"macro-level analyses"*** is the "state" or "country". There are relatively few such studies, particularly those that examine differences in policy implementation at the line level across states. Exceptions are studies examining the impact of historical patterns and cultural beliefs (Raaphorst et al., 2025), national settings on the capacities of line bureaucrats to meet client needs (Jewell, 2007; Rice, 2017), individual and collective settings of working conditions that are greater than the influence of states (Rutz et al., 2017; Eriksson & Johansson, 2022), strategic communication (Andersen & Jakobsen, 2017; Davidovitz & Cohen, 2021; Lee, 2022), culture or larger national changes on policy processes (Cohen, 2018; Grossi, Sacco & Blessi, 2023), institutional environment and regional situation (Zhan, Lo & Tang, 2014; Pan & Zhang, 2022; Gavkalova, Syromolot & Lukashev, 2023) and marketization and privatization of public services on policy implementation (Hansen & Lindholst, 2016; Hansen, Lindhols, & Greve, 2020; Fleischer et al., 2024).

Of the above types of analyses of policy implementation at the line level, *micro-level analyses predominate to date, with limited use of meso-, and macro-level analyses, which would allow the identification of variations across* organisations, professions, and states or countries. According to Gofen, Sella, and Gassner (2019), the focus of micro-level analyses is most often to answer the following three types of questions:

- ***How do line bureaucrats exercise discretion during direct interactions?*** (see e.g., Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Handler, 1986; Brodkin, 2003, 2011a, 2012; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014; Zang & Musheno, 2017; Johannessen, 2019; Agger & Tortzen, 2023; Blijleven, 2023; Kipo-Sunyehzi, Brenya & Fusheini, 2023; Leijon & Moberg, 2025);
- ***What resources influence the actions of line bureaucrats and their willingness to implement policy, and how and to what extent might they be influenced?*** (see e.g., Brodkin, 1997, 2003, 2012; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000, 2003, 2022; Hupe & Hill, 2007; May & Winter, 2009; Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2010; Harrits & Møller, 2014; Tummers, Bekkers, Vink & Musheno, 2015; Yang, Li & Huang, 2021; Yaro, 2023; Yu, 2024); and
- ***What does responsible, ethical, or honest behaviour mean, and how do line workers implement it?*** (see e.g., Riccucci, 2007; O'Leary, 2010; Borry & Henderson, 2020; Neo, Grimmelikhujsen & Tummers, 2022; Lovell, 2024; Bergue, 2025).

According to Gofen, Sella and Gassner (2019), the main ***shortcomings of the current analyses of "street-level bureaucracy"*** can be considered the existence of a small number of studies that focus on (i) comparison of implementation at line levels between different professions, specifically on differences in attitudes, reactions, use of discretion, client relationships and training (exceptions are Hupe & Buffat, 2014; Nielsen, 2015; Tummers et al., 2015; Hupe, 2019f), (ii) embedding of individual workers into the organisational context (e.g., Dias & Maynard-Moody, 2007; Brodkin, 2008, 2011a; Ellis, 2011; Cohen et al., 2016; Davidovitz et al., 2022), or (iii) where the unit of analysis is the organisation (e.g., May & Winter, 2009; Keiser, 2010; Oberfield, 2010; Andersen & Jakobsen, 2016; Destler, 2017; Brodkin, 2021; Park, 2022; Spitzmueller, 2023). Furthermore, current studies that examine the influence of political arrangement in the form of the type of scope of discretion on the actors provided (iv) focus mainly on the analysis of workers of one or more professions in one kind of political setting (e.g., Brodkin, 2003, 2011a; Riccucci, 2005; May & Winter, 2009;

Keiser, 2010; Tummers, Bekkers & Steijn, 2012; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014; Cohen et al., 2016; van Berkel, de Vries & van der Aa, 2020; Hinterleitner & Wittwer, 2023; Macip-Simó et al., 2025).

Considering the above-mentioned limitations in existing studies focused on policy implementation at the line level, according to Gofen, Sella and Gassner (2019), the following recommendations can be formulated: (i) conduct more comparative research that focuses on meso-level analysis, in which the unit of analysis would be the organisation, policy, and profession, (ii) pay more attention to multiple, nested, units of analysis, as different organisations are characterized by different work settings, different types of interaction routines, and different degrees of discretion, and (iii) move away from the current trend of perceive policy-clients as passive rather than active actors.

3.1.2 Contexts to Consider when Analysing Public Policy Implementation at the Street Level

When implementing public policy and deciding how services are provided, line workers are significantly influenced by the institutional contexts in which they operate. In this context, it is helpful to consider the following ***categories of independent variables that directly or indirectly influence policy implementation by line workers***, as highlighted by Hill and Hupe two decades ago: (i) “policy characteristics”, (ii) “policy formation” in the sense of the effort to structure policy from the top, (iii) “vertical public administration” focusing on the relationships between the layers in the policy transmission process, for example between the federal government and the state or between the state and local government, and the factors that influence them, (iv) “factors affecting the responses of implementation agencies and issues about the behaviour of front-line staff” such as the control of the organisation, its formal and informal links with the body “forming” or “enforcing” the policy, and the “dispositions” or “responses” of policy implementers, (v) “horizontal inter-organisational relationships” between parallel implementing organisations, (vi) “the impact of responses from those affected by the policy”, and (vii) “wider macro-environmental factors”, in particular then those over which governments can have little or no influence, such as changes in the moral climate of a nation,

demographic changes, global economic pressures, etc. (for more details, see Hill & Hupe, 2002, pp. 123-136).

Exploring the institutional environment in which public policy is implemented is important, as it allows us to examine *the differences in the characteristics of the national, political, and policy systems that can significantly influence the political process, including public policy implementation at the local level and, thus, its outcomes*. In this context, Hill and Hupe (2009) point out the existence of several ***theoretical approaches that relate implementation theory and institutional contexts of policy*** and that note four main themes: (i) "constitutional systems" and their influence on political decision-making and policy implementation concerning the division of powers[57], (ii) "styles of public administration" with special regard to the overall organisation of the administration[58], (iii) "socio-economic regimes", where differences in policy responses to political problems lead to differences in their implementation[59], and (iv) "implementation regimes" that enable identification of differences in approaches to policy regulation, which are also influenced by the macro-institutional framework[60], the structure of civil society, the general political culture and fundamental norms and values (for more details, see Hill & Hupe, 2009, pp. 182-183). In addition to "implementation regimes", it is worth noting that all the topics mentioned above represent conditions under which policy is shaped and, at the same time, influence its implementation.

[57] Lijphart's (1999) distinction between the dimensions of "majoritarian" vs. "consensual" systems and the dimensions of "unitary" vs. "federal" systems can be applied here, where the first distinction should be reflected not only at the level of policy agenda-setting but also throughout the system, including the implementation phase, and where in the second distinction federalism requires that adaptation be achieved in a context in which the constitutional division of powers leaves room for negotiation.

[58] They can be identified, for example, using Dyson's (1980) distinction between "strong states" and "weak states", or the model of Richardson (1982) and later Boven et al. (2001), who distinguish between "anticipatory style" versus "reactive style" and "consensus-seeking style" versus "style based on imposing decisions on society".

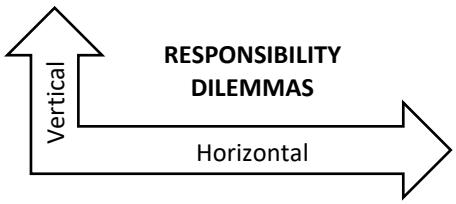
[59] Originally, the focus of interest was on Esping-Andersens' regime theories, which distinguish mainly between liberal market societies and conservative regimes (and also social democratic regimes, which are not important here), and where economic activity was seen as more coordinated, with government playing a key role in conservative than liberal systems, and where coordination of economic activity requires fine-tuning of implementation. At the same time, a strict regulatory structure may characterise a system that leaves much to the market.

[60] The macro-institutional framework includes factors such as (i) country-specific political, legal, and public service/administrative institutions, (ii) the separation of public and private law, (iii) the degree and nature of constitutional checks and balances on the political and administrative exercise of power, (iv) the recruitment, selection, and training of civil servants, and (v) their professional identity (Hill & Hupe, 2009, p. 182).

In addition to the institutional contexts of public administration in which line workers are part, the way they consider the policies they implement and the services they provide is also influenced by ***accountability regimes*** (Sager, Thomann & Hupe, 2021). These arise from the role they play in a given organisation. According to Hupe and Hill (2007) and Hupe and van der Krogt (2013), there are four accountability regimes that differ in their sources, types of accountability, forms of action regulation, and pressures exerted on workers. They are: (i) "state" based on "political-administrative accountability", where regulations such as caseloads, political goals or performance indicators are monitored and represent "rule pressure", (ii) "market" based on "customer/stakeholder accountability", where regulations such as cost minimisation, benefit maximisation, customer satisfaction or competition are monitored, which represent "incentive pressure", (iii) "profession" based on "vocational accountability", where regulations such as good practices, professional training or professional values, norms and attitudes are monitored, which generate "vocational pressure", and (iv) "society" based on "participatory accountability", where especially action prescriptions regarding the mediatised social expectations of target groups and perceived needs of clients, which generate "societal pressure" are monitored (see Figure 3.1 for more details).

Figure 3.1 Accountability regimes in line organisations

KEY SOURCE	STATE	MARKET	PROFESSION	SOCIETY
ACCOUNTABILITY	• Political-administrative	• Customer and shareholder oriented	• Vocational	• Participatory
ACTION PRESCRIPTIONS 	• Number of cases • Policy goals • Performance indicators • etc.	• Cost minimisation • Benefit maximisation • Customer satisfaction • Shareholder value creation • Competition • etc.	• Professional values, norms, and attitudes • Good practice • Peer review • Training • etc.	• Media • Social expectations • Perceived clients´ needs • etc.
	Rule pressure	**Incentive pressure**	**Vocational pressure**	**Societal pressure**



Source: Hupe & Hill (2007), Hupe & van der Krogt (2013), and Thoman et al. (2018)

According to van Berkel, Caswell, Kupka, and Larsen (2017), to understand the implementation of public and social policies at the line level, it is appropriate to consider four types of complex contexts that influence line workers' practices and, in turn, their provision of public services. These include (i) the "policy context" and (ii) the "governance context", within which more or less significant changes have occurred in recent decades in many countries of the world as a result of public administration reforms, and (iii) the "organisational context" and (iv) the "occupation context", which have been directly affected by these reforms.

The "policy context" is made up of laws and regulations that define the conditions for the provision of services and includes explicitly (a) objectives and (b) policy instruments, (c) target groups and (d) the mix of enabling and disciplining elements that are expected to be achieved in the case of objectives and used in the case of instruments and measures.

The "governance context" is represented by service delivery models and focuses explicitly on the ways (a) in which the delivery and provision are organised, (b) the agencies and actors involved in them, and (c) how the relations between them are structured. These are typically service delivery models, such as quasi-markets and service networks, or focus on the management of line organisations responsible for service delivery.[61]

The "organisational context" is the result of decisions made by the management of the implementing organisation that shape the work and working conditions of line workers, such as (a) job design and task descriptions, (b) autonomy, (c) caseload, and (d) managing their performance. The focus is on the extent to which the mix of bureaucratic (rule-based), professional, and managerial elements at the organisational level influences the organisation and management of line workers' activities.

The "occupational context" refers to (a) the professional education and (b) socialisation of line workers, (c) the role of professional associations in policy formation and implementation, and (d) the influence of professionalism on the way they act and

[61] In many countries, governance reforms have taken place, which have been manifested in particular by (i) the expansion of traditional actors involved in the creation and implementation of employment and social policies to include other public or private organisations, (ii) the merger of traditional organisations, (iii) the increase in various forms of cooperation between organisations, and (iv) the introduction of new public management into state administration (for more details, see Caswell, Lasen, van Berkel & Kupka, 2017 and selected parts of this work, subchapters 1.1.2 and 1.2.1 on governance and 2.1.2 and 2.1.4 on new public management).

provide services to citizens. As noted in the previous chapter, the professional context has lost importance in recent years for line workers implementing policies. The reason lies in the fact that these *workers often lack a uniform professional profile, as they are typically representatives of different professions and constitute a heterogeneous group, for example*, in the context of employment policy (van Berkel & Knies, 2018; Ohls, 2020; Peeters & Campos, 2022). The heterogeneity of their professional training thus often leads to differences in their practices, which partly depend on the specific (e) skills, (f) competences and (g) attitudes that these workers have acquired as part of their professional education (for more details, see Caswell, Lasen, van Berkel & Kupka, 2017; Bonifacio & Marcolin, 2024).

The existence of the contexts mentioned above and their impact on line workers can be described as follows: workers are (i) "deeply integrated" into the logics of public sector functioning and service delivery models that make them responsible for the implementation of specific outputs and results and which they often achieve in collaboration with workers from other organisations and agencies, (ii) they are expected to contribute to the fulfilment of the strategic goals of the organisation in which they work, and (iii) they are often members of employee or professional groups or have studied a specific occupation or profession, whose values and standards they use to implement "good work" and provide quality services to heterogeneous groups of clients with different needs and problems (Caswell, Larsen, van Berkel & Kupka, 2017, pp. 181-2).

The importance of examining individual contexts, which do not affect the worker in isolation, but in configurations, lies in the fact that they structure the practices of line workers and contribute to constructing their "dispositions" (Zacka, 2017), respectively "frames of reference" (Eikenaar, Rijk & Meershoek, 2016). They provide meanings, interpretative frameworks, norms, and incentives for how to do work and how to work with citizens. They contain information, signals, and guidelines on how workers should view clients, what their roles entail, how they should perceive clients' situations and problems, and, if necessary, how to modify their behaviour (van Berkel, 2017b). These contexts often send diverse and conflicting signals about what to do and how, and, in fact, exert pressure on what line workers should do, how they should do it, and what resources are available to do so.

Within these contexts, ***examining specific contextual factors is helpful*** for at least two reasons. First, they allow us to explain and understand (i) how contextual characteristics relate to the particular practices and outcomes of line workers, or, instead, how contextual characteristics structure the space available to line workers for discretionary decision-making and the ways in which discretion is exercised and can be exercised. They also allow us to understand (ii) how formal policies are made and re-made at the line level "when they travel through governance structures and implementing agencies and eventually become practices in the interactions between frontline workers and their clients" (van Berkel, 2017a, p. 26).

3.2 Selected Conceptual Tools Usable to Examine Variables Influencing the Implementation of Public Policy by Street-Level Bureaucrats

Given that the implementation process is very complex, which is reflected in the fact that many interacting factors influence line workers, ***no theory has yet been able to fully explain how line bureaucrats/workers exercise their discretion in the provision of public services*** (Winter, 2012; Brodkin, 2011a, 2012; Meyers & Nielsen, 2012; Hupe & Buffat, 2014; Gofen, 2014; Gofen, Sella & Gassner, 2019; Ryan, 2023; Miller, 2024). Nevertheless, there are efforts to capture this complex topic, which some authors have addressed using analytical tools they have developed, most often labelled "models" or "frameworks". In the first case, ***"Models"*** involve specific sets of expected relationships among a limited range of selected variables, the consequences of which can be systematically examined within a limited set of results, e.g., through logic, mathematics, game theory, experimentation, or simulation. ***"Frameworks"*** are, in contrast, less specific: they list variables and identify the relationships among them that must be considered in institutional analysis, and they are applicable across all types of institutional arrangements. At the same time, they provide a metatheoretical language for comparing theories and for raising questions that need to be addressed when analysts first undertake an analysis (for more details, see Ostrom, 2007, pp. 25-26 or Nilsen, 2015). The general framework thus enables the generation of theory and the construction of a specified model (Hill & Hupe, 2021).

In the following subchapters, we present selected "frameworks" and "models" that we consider highly beneficial for the study of public policy implementation at the line level.

These analytical tools served as inspiration and a source of information for developing our "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers", which we explain in greater detail in the following chapter. *Except for the first of the presented analytical tools* ("Multiple Governance Framework"), which is of a general nature and can be used to examine public policy implementation at different levels of the system and therefore not only at the line level, *the other frameworks and models allow us to identify and possibly even point to the interrelationships between various factors that influence the implementation of public policy by actors exclusively at the line level*[62].

3.2.1 The Multiple Governance Framework and the Perspective of Public Policy Implementation as "Operational Governance"

The "Multiple Governance Framework" (MGF), developed by political science associate professors Peter Hupe and Michael Hill, is constructed through two dimensions: (i) "action scales", which can be identified at the level of the political-administrative "system", implementing "organisations" securing institutional relationships and "individuals" at the line level, and (ii) "action dimensions". These specifically concern "constitutive governance", which focuses on the processes involved in designing the policy system and its institutions at the national and local levels, maintaining the system, and designing local implementation policies, "directive governance", which involves designing legislation and regulations, creating policy frameworks, and designing and maintaining implementation trajectories and "operational governance", which concerns the management of political and inter-organisational relationships and external and internal relations (see Figure 3.2). These three types of governance represent broad sets of activities and simultaneously empirically observable levels of activity, referred to as the "trias gubernandi", which any actor can practise in the political process.

[62] The creation of these sophisticated analytical tools was preceded by approaches by authors who tried to categorize the sources of influence on implementation behaviour, e.g., by distinguishing between (i) "individual characteristics of workers", (ii) "organisational characteristics", (iii) "extra-organisational factors", and (iv) "client attributes" (Loyens & Maeschalck, 2010), or sets of influences in the form of (v) "signals from politicians and superiors", (vi) "organisational implementation machinery", (vii) "knowledge and attitude of the worker" as regards their work and their clients, and (viii) "contextual factors" representing type of workload (May & Winter, 2009; for more details, also Gofen, Sella & Gassner, 2019).

Figure 3.2 The Multiple Governance Framework

SCALE OF ACTION SITUATIONS	ACTION LEVELS: „TRIAS GUBERNANDI“		
	Constitutive Governance	**Directive Governance**	**Operational Governance**
System	• Institutional design	• General rule setting	• Managing trajectories
Organisation	• Designing contextual relations	• Context maintenance	• Managing relations
Individual	• Developing professional norms	• Situation beyond rule application	• Managing contacts

Source: Hupe & Hill (2006, p.23)

This framework is essential for examining public policy implementation, which, according to Hill and Hupe (2009: 126), can be viewed from two perspectives/meanings that the MGF is able to capture/grasp: (i) as a "focus" of a series of activities of so-called "operational governance" aimed at the realization of given goals, or (ii) as a "locus", a "level of action", which refers to the scale of actions of organisations or individuals, which usually represent the world of implementing organisations at the line level. The main contribution of this framework is its ability to reveal the answer to the question: *"Who acts (actors), where (administrative layers), doing what (action levels), on which scale (action situations), and how (political-administrative craftsmanship)?"*

While mainstream implementation studies have traditionally focused on the links between outcomes observed "at the bottom" and intentions formulated "above", and in "synthesizing approaches" the sources for identifying relevant factors are no longer limited to either "above" or "at the bottom" (see subchapter 1.1.2), in governance research frameworks (such as MGF) the original vertical orientation questioning the relationship between intentions and achievements is shifting to a more horizontal orientation focused on explaining variations in actual behaviour and its impacts on performance. More precisely, MGF enables the identification of various operational governance activities at sub-levels that extend beyond a single layer of government.

The benefit of this analytical tool is that it allows the assessment of the context in which implementation actors operate. Specifically, this framework includes ***three different modes of governance*** labelled "authority", "transaction", and "persuasion", which are based on general normative principles corresponding to the control system applied in hierarchies, markets, and networks. They are usually found in a mixed form at different locations in the political-administrative system ("policy setting", "institutional setting" and

“micro-setting”), where various levels of action/governance can be observed simultaneously (“constitutional”, “directive” and “operational” - see below). Importantly, *in each “locus” there is a range of factors that together form the specific context of action in which implementation is to be managed (governed).* For all three settings, there are several dimensions and a summary variable.

Specifically, the MGF was created based on an analytical grouping of various categories of independent variables representing policy factors that can be identified in any political-administrative system and which were "compressed" into the following *three macro-areas of political-societal relations* observable in this system:

- ***The macro-level focused on relations between government and society, called the “Political-administrative system,” and representing the “Policy setting”***, which is shaped by macro-environmental factors, policy characteristics, and policy-making. It represents the layer of the national government and the “high state institutions” around it, where public policies are designed and implemented, and where administrative, political, experimental, and symbolic forms of implementation can be distinguished.
- ***The meso-level focused on intervening institutional relations, called “Institutional relations,” and representing the “Institutional setting”***, which is formed by vertical layers and horizontal inter-organisational relationships.
- ***The micro-level representing “Street-level” locus and called the “Micro-setting”***, which is shaped by the characteristics of the implementing organisation, the behaviour of frontline employees, and the reactions of those affected by the policy. Contacts occur here between employees across various, more or less mutually cooperating implementing organisations, which differ in both the nature of their bureaucratic work and the outputs and results they produce.

At any of these points of political-social relations, the aforementioned "constitutive", "directive" and "operational" levels of action (governance) can be observed simultaneously, which differ as follows:

- ***"Constitutional action"*** focuses primarily on the processes related to designing the policy system and its institutions at the national and local levels, maintaining the system, and designing local implementation policies;
- ***"Directive action"*** consists of designing legislation and regulations, creating policy frameworks, and designing and maintaining implementation trajectories/pathways; and
- ***"Operational action"*** concerns the management of political and inter-organisational relationships, and external and internal relations.

The information mentioned above, which further specifies the levels of governance according to the type of political-social relations, is presented in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3 The Multiple Governance Framework (version 2)

LOCUS IN POLITICAL-SOCIETAL RELATIONS	LEVEL OF ACTION		
	Constitutional	**Directive**	**Operational**
Political-administrative system	• Designing political and administrative institutions • System design (e.g., inter-governmental relations)	• Formulation and decision (designing legislation and policy statutories) • Creating policy frameworks (e.g., institutionalising oversight)	• Managing policy processes
Institutional relations	• System maintenance	• Designing and maintaining implementation trajectories	• Managing inter-organisational relations
„Street level"	• Designing local institutions	• Designing local „implementation policies"	• Managing external and internal contracts

Source: author based on Hupe & Hill (2006, p.23) and Hill & Hupe (2002, p.183)

While the configuration of variables within the framework can be manipulated in each of the different "locus" and actually changes over time and place, there is also a *"meta-locus"* outside this framework, where various causal and therefore challenging to influence variables exist in the form of (i) "institutional environments", (ii) "sociocultural and economic development" and (iii) "reform ideologies" that have impacts on different locations of political-social relations.

From the above, it follows that *the process of public policy implementation is an integral part of governance and can be understood as "operational governance", which involves "managing implementation"* (Hill & Hupe, 2009). It is a type of activity involving the implementation of decisions and activities, which have three different forms according to the specific "locus" in political-social relations. These are "managing policy processes" in the political-administrative system, "managing inter-organisational relations" in organisations, and "managing external and internal contacts" by individuals (see the right column in Figure 3.3). These forms of implementation management manifest themselves differently in specific ways of governance and can be described in the following perspectives (Hill & Hupe 2009, pp. 188-9, more specifically Figure 3.4 below):

- In the perspective of ***managing implementation through "governance-by-authority", referred to as the "enforcement" perspective***, the primary control mechanism is the "rule" and main operational activity is "management through inputs": (i) "managing policy processes" means that mandates are explicitly set, i.e. responsibilities for management through inputs, when and where a particular policy is applied, (ii) "managing inter-organisational relations" it is essential to clarify tasks and areas of competence and to take care of sufficient resources, and (iii) "managing external and internal contracts" means for individual line bureaucrats, or their superiors, to take care of standard operating procedures and ensure their compliance, demonstrate leadership, increase motivation and internalization and provide training in the workplace. Continuous and coherent implementation requires appropriate "vertical chain connections" between the line-level implementation setting, the policy setting, and the wider institutional environment.
- In the perspective of ***managing implementation through "governance by transaction" referred to as the "performance" perspective***, the central management mechanism is the "contract" and main operational activity is "management through outputs": (i) "managing policy processes" requires the creation of "interfaces" by providing appropriate policy frameworks at the management level, (ii) "managing inter-organisational relations" concerns, in addition to operational actions, the improvement of contract fulfilment, and (iii) "managing external and internal contracts" consists in strengthening and maintaining service orientation and rewarding for the fulfilment of

objectives (outputs). Coherent implementation requires appropriate vertical linkages, which here have a "vertical rope" character, since the linkage through contracts is lost.

- In the perspective of ***managing implementation through "governance via persuasion", referred to as the "co-production" perspective***, "trust" is the primary governing mechanism and the main operational activity is "management through results" as shared outcomes: (i) "managing policy processes" is based on an appeal for accountability and consists in leaving freedom to other actors and inviting them to participate, (ii) "managing inter-organisational relations" includes, for example, the implementation of partnership and (iii) "managing external and internal contracts" includes strengthening the professionalization and institutionalization of client participation, mutual evaluation and the establishment of procedures for possible complaints. Continuous and coherent implementation requires appropriate vertical linkages that are like a "woven thread" when ties are tight, and relationships among actors are more coordinated.

Figure 3.4 Prescriptive perspectives on managing the implementation of public policy as modes of operational governance

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES	**PRESCRIPTIVE PERSPECTIVE MANAGEMENT VIA**		
	„Enforcement" (Inputs)	**„Performance management"** (Outputs)	**„Co-production"** (Outcomes as shared results)
Managing policy processes	• Making responsibilities explicit	• Creating „interfaces"	• Making discretion explicit
Managing inter-organisational relations	• Creating clarity on tasks and competencies • Taking care of sufficient resources	• Enhancing contract compliance	• Realising partnership
Managing external and internal interpersonal contacts	• Enhancing motivation and internalisation • Realising compliance with standard operating procedures • Leadership • Training on the job	• Enhancing and maintaining service orientation • Rewarding target compliance	• Enhancing professionalisation • Institutionalising client participation • Enhancing coordinated service delivery • Account management
Central control mechanism	• „Rules"	• „Contract"	• „Trust"

Source: Hill & Hupe (2002, p.190; 2009, p.189)

The above-mentioned perspectives on the governance/management of public policy implementation are designed to be cognitively and analytically useful. In reality, they are rarely observable in their pure form because implementation management occurs in diverse contexts. A significant factor here is the level of managerial ambition ("willingness") and the level of competence ("ability") of the actors involved in policy implementation.

3.2.2 The General Analytical Framework for Examining the Influence of the Organisational Environment on the Behaviour of Line Bureaucrats

Americans Christopher Jewell and Bonnie Glaser (2006) developed the "General Analytical Framework," designed to examine and evaluate how the organisational environment structures the work of line bureaucrats, influences their behaviour when interacting with clients to achieve policy goals, and thus shapes the way policy is delivered. Based on an extensive analysis of case work carried out in social security and labour offices, they created *six sets of variables that influence how line employees make decisions and implement specific policies*, and thus allow them to explain differences in the ability of different types of line workers to integrate policy goals into their interactions with clients (see Figure 3.5 for more details).

Figure 3.5 Sets of variables forming "The General Analytical Framework"

VARIABLE	EXPLANATION
Authority	• The ability of workers to influence clients, which results from their position as stated in the job description; it concerns what is required of them and the discretion they have in deciding how and when to use it; it includes the resources they can use for the benefit of clients and the ability to sanction clients.
Role expectations	• The worker's perception and attitude towards their work and their clients.[63]
Workload	• The demands placed on staff are regular, resulting from the regulations they must apply and the needs of clients; workload includes both the number of clients and staff and the number of tasks and decisions made with clients.
Client contact	• The frequency, length of time, and quality of interactions with clients; includes the overall environment in which interactions occur and the workplace atmosphere.
Knowledge and Expertise	• How staff understand program policies and goals, client opportunities and needs, and what skills staff have available to assess client problems and engage them in their solutions; includes education, training, knowledge of policies/programs, and organisational and community resources available to deliver policies.
Incentives	• Formal and informal reward and punishment systems are used to manage workers, which influence how workers act; typically, workers are motivated to complete the work for which they are evaluated and avoid extra work or negative attention from superiors or clients; at the individual level, it is also about the internal satisfaction of workers.

Source: author based on Jewell & Glaser (2006)

[63] In the case of labour market policy, this may be, for example, the role of an (i) "administrator" responsible for providing benefits, or (ii) an "advisor" whose goal is to motivate clients and provide employment-related resources.

These authors thus assumed that line workers' actions are not simply individualistic, as they depend on current contextual incentives and constraints arising from organisational processes (Baumgartner, 1992; Brodkin, 1997; Chen, 2022; van Triest, 2024) and on organisations' ability to change these conditions (Elmore, 1979; Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Härenstam, Pousette & Berntson, 2022; Härenstam, Björk & Corin 2024; Larsen, Møller & Raaphorst, 2025).

3.2.3 The Micro-institutionalist Model of Policy Implementation

German sociologist Deborah Rice has developed the "Micro-institutionalist Model of Policy Implementation", which serves as a theoretical tool for understanding ***how diverse social systems and institutions influence the relationship between citizens and caseworkers of local implementing organisations, and how these interactions, in turn, shape social structures***[64]***.*** Specifically, this model allows us to understand how the interactions between line workers and clients are influenced by (i) "worker-client interactions" at the micro level, (ii) "characteristics of the implementing organisation" at the meso level and (iii) "wider societal context" at the macro level, and how the outcomes of these interactions influence these structures at each level (see Figure 3.6 below).

The micro-institutionalist theory of policy implementation proposed by this author is based on the assumption that the welfare state is an institution that lives not in abstract regulations and legal texts, but in everyday interactions between caseworkers and clients in local social services. This theory provides two essential insights/understandings: (i) the aggregated autonomous action of individual policy implementers have the power to change the institution of the welfare state and wider societal systems, for example, if labour market policy workers leave breadwinner mothers at home when they should be required by law to look for work, this will affect not only social policy but also family structures and the composition of the labour force in the market, (ii) the claim that the welfare state is real only if personal interactions create it means that „the institutional

[64] Specifically, Rice draws on the assumption of the institutional theory of classical sociology that human action is embedded in institutional contexts, where "institutions" represent (i) structured social practices, (ii) ideas about the world that arguably come into being through the aggregated and increasingly standardized interactions of people, (iii) that legitimize certain actions while prohibiting others in a particular type of situation, and (iv) are essential part of larger economic, political, and cultural systemic landscapes (pp. 1040-1041).

outputs and systemic outcomes of welfare states are likely to vary across the organisational and local contexts in which these interactions are embedded“ (Rice, 2012, p. 1056). Indeed, welfare states are institutionally diverse not only across states but also within individual states. At the same time, they are in constant change as a result of aggregated, at least partially autonomous micro-level negotiations.

The benefit of this approach, according to Rice, is that “it develops the original street-level bureaucracy approach” in the following four aspects (Rice 2012, p. 1056, see Figure 3.7):

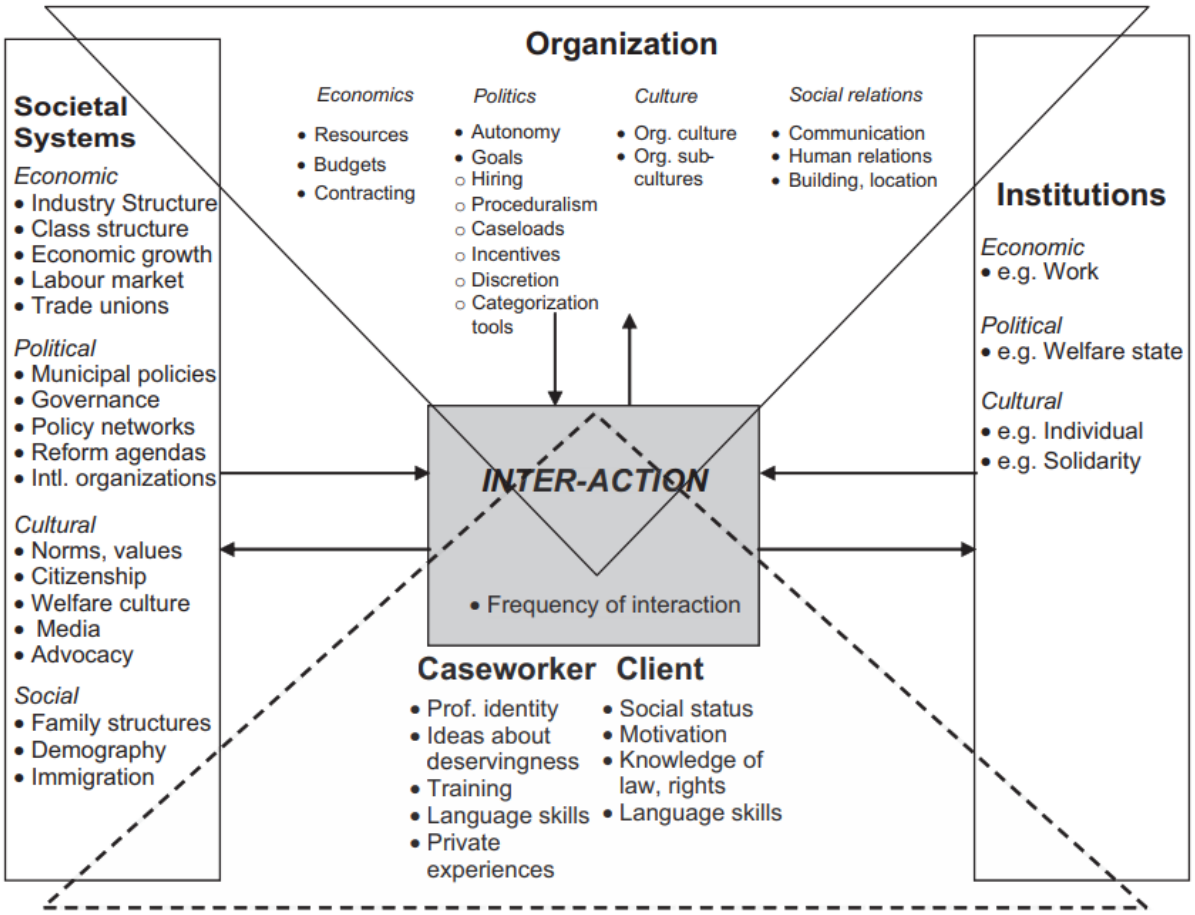
- It clarifies the interrelatedness between the caseworker–client interaction and its broader institutional and systemic context.
- The process and outcome of the interaction are influenced not only by the caseworker but also by the client, as the caseworker may act with the client differently depending on who the client is and what that means for the worker.
- It explicates the social mechanisms by which the welfare state as an institution frames and shapes the caseworker–client interaction, thereby also welfare outcomes for clients and eventually, in an aggregated way, societal structures.
- It provides a theoretical framework for bringing together culturalist or phenomenological approaches on the one hand and rationalist or realist approaches on the other hand.

Figure 3.6 Areas and variables shaping the „Micro-institutionalist Model of Policy Implementation“

AREA	VARIABLE	EXPLANATION
MICRO-LEVEL: interaction between caseworkers and clients	The role of the caseworker	• It is shaped by professional identity, the idea of client merit, education and training, and personal experiences with different types of clients.
	The role of the client	• They belong to a particular status group, characterised by physical characteristics such as skin colour, gender, age, sexuality, character type, motivation, knowledge of rights and obligations, and language skills.
MESO-LEVEL: characteristics of organisations	Organisational politics	• It determines the degree of autonomy, goals set by top management, such as cost savings, client processing efficiency, and adequacy of client needs; goals may vary between and within regions and usually relate to the recruitment of a specific type of staff, the degree of proceduralism, regulation of the number of clients, work incentives, the extent of discretion granted by middle management, and tools used to categorize clients in the form of computer programs or conversation guides.
	The organisational economy	• It includes available time, financial, human, and skill resources, budgets, quantity, and quality of contacts with private providers such as employers, consultants, community projects, or educators who can help expand the services offered to clients.
	Organisational culture	• It allows for the reconciliation of often divergent organisational goals and personal values when dealing with clients; within one organisation, there are often different subcultures of workers (traditionalists, fatalistic isolationists, competitive individualists, egalitarian team players, or innovators).
	Social relations within the organisation	• They relate primarily to communication between line workers when conveying harmful or beneficial attitudes towards certain types of clients, good human relations, which are a prerequisite for providing quality services, and the space, equipment, and location of the office, which are a signal to clients to what extent the organisation values and respects them.
MACRO-LEVEL: wider societal context	The social environment	• It is shaped by household structure, demographic trends such as population ageing, or migration.
	The cultural environment	• It is based primarily on the observance and transmission of specific norms and values through the media and proxy networks, on public agreement with the legitimacy and goals of public institutions providing services that should be provided to citizens, including the idea of citizenship that should guarantee the possibility of using these services if necessary (e.g., whether to provide services to clients of a different gender, age, religion, sexual orientation).
	The economic environment	• It concerns the structure of economic production, the class division of society, the rate of economic growth, the unemployment rate, or the influence of trade unions.
	The political environment	• It can be influenced by city policies such as compliance with guidelines created by the municipal government, network structures between the implementing organisation and other public and private organisations, local or regional partnerships between implementing organisations and employers, trade unions, non-governmental organisations, agendas introduced during welfare state reforms, or international organisations (e.g., EU institutions when financing projects financed from the ESIF).

Source: author based on Rice (2012)

Figure 3.7 Overview of systems and institutions influencing the caseworker–client interaction



Source: Rice (2012, p.1055)

The suitability of this analytical tool is evidenced by numerous studies that refer to or use it (e.g., Cloutier et al., 2016; Bruhn & Ekström, 2017; Perna, 2021; Andreotti, Coletto & Rio, 2023; Au-Yeung et al., 2023; Bakkeli, 2023b; Andreassen, Breit & Saltkjel, 2025). Recent studies in this context highlight the importance of factors that shape the high scope of discretion of line workers, identifiable at the macro, meso, and micro levels. More specifically, they have the form of legislation, public information, large associations and integration of the social service system in the first case, the interpretation of the performance of roles by managers, self-organisation and community action in the second case, and personal and family situations, emotions, ethics and direct relationships of workers with responsible persons in the third case (Saruis, 2015; Møller, Pedersen & Pors, 2022; Peris Cancio & Monteiro Mustafá, 2024).

3.2.4 Theoretical Framework for Analysing the Organisational Origins of Administrative Burdens

The Dutch professor of public administration, Rik Peeters (2020), created an ideal-typical "Theoretical Framework for Analysing the Organisational Causes of Administrative Burdens" of line bureaucrats implementing policy, which is based on the assumption and findings of many studies that administrative burden is a necessary and intractable part of the functioning of the political-administrative system. At the same time, it is possible to identify it in the design of policies, programs, and procedures, as well as in the outcomes of behaviour and coping mechanisms used by line workers. According to this author, ***the main reason to address the administrative burden on line workers is its impact on citizens' access to the public services to which they are entitled.*** This framework comprises four quadrants representing different types of "organisational origins" of administrative burden. It includes specific variables that enable the identification of individual causes of administrative burden based on their "intentionality" and "formality". Specifically, these are the following types of burden (see Figure 3.8 for more details):

- ***"Formal and unintentional" burden*** based on the system architecture, where administrative burdens arise from the formal structure of the organisation or policy system and their unintended consequences for citizens.
- ***"Formal and intentional" burden*** based on policy-making by other means, which are represented by so-called "hidden politics" (Moynihan, Herd & Harvey, 2014) or "proxy policies" (Elster, 1992). These are intentionally built into policy implementation schemes as deliberate, planned restrictions or denials of access to rights and services through bureaucratic procedures and service requirements. The problem here is how existing capacities are used or deliberately neglected by line workers.
- ***"Informal and intentional" burden*** based on the promotion of particular interests, which are the result of deliberate behaviour by line bureaucrats, often in response to structural characteristics of the administrative context formed by formal rules. In this context, a parallel system of informal rules and practices is created, used in ad hoc situations where the application of bureaucratic practices is restrictive and time-consuming.

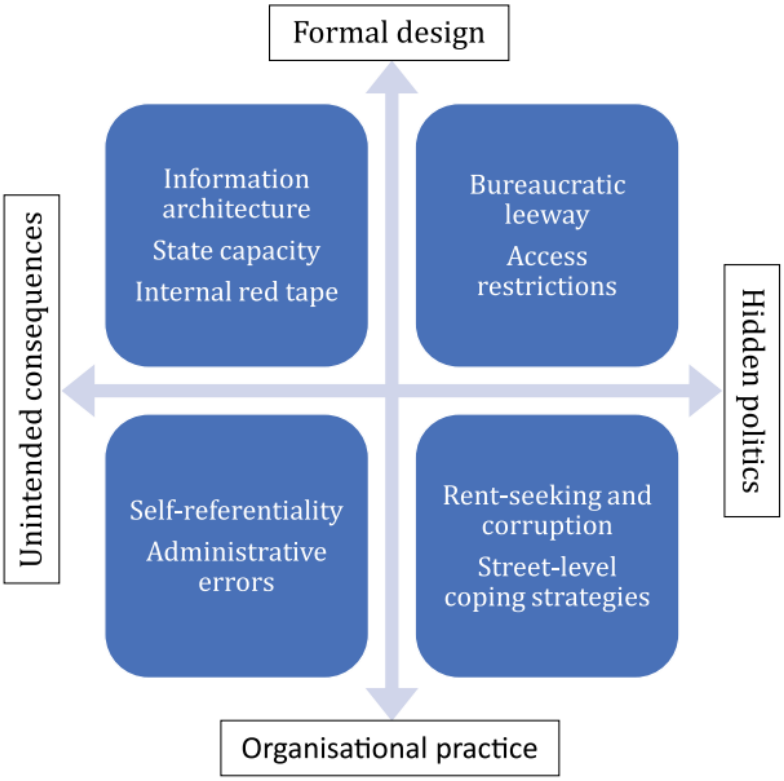
- ***"Informal and unintentional" burden*** based on self-referentiality and errors, which is the result of unintentional errors by line workers.

Figure 3.8 Types of administrative burden and corresponding variables forming "The Framework for Analysing the Organisational Origins of Administrative Burdens "

TYPE OF ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN	**VARIABLE** (source of burden)	**EXPLANATION** (burden source identification)
„FORMAL AND UNINTENTIONAL" based on system architecture	Information architecture	• Standardised and centralised technologies create a so-called "digital cage" (Peeters & Widlak, 2018) by limiting the autonomy and space for independent decision-making of line workers, thus excluding citizens from the services provided.
	State capacity	• Organisational capacity or state capacity in the form of a "general weakness" of state institutions to implement what formal law dictates should be achieved in the form of limited coercive, taxing, or information capacity (especially in developing countries); this is a consequence of "formal policy design", which is characterized by structural deficiencies, especially in the capacity to govern, the ability to learn, or the ability to anticipate future developments
	Internal red tape	• Strict operational rules controlling bureaucratic decision-making and performance at the street level often make it impossible for organisations and line workers to cope with the diverse interests of citizens.
„FORMAL AND INTENTIONAL" based on policy making by other means	Bureaucratic leeway	• Freedom of choice used to create barriers (e.g., introducing criteria for opening abortion clinics).
	Restricting access	• Placing excessive demands on government programs, for example, by shortening the application period for benefits or defunding administrative organisations, causing capacity problems and introducing waiting lists.
„INFORMAL AND INTENTIONAL" based on particular interests	Rent-seeking and corruption	• Unsatisfactory behaviour of officials who use their formal positions as "gatekeepers" or "enforcers" of a state monopoly to provide preferential treatment in exchange for financial or other personal benefits provided by private actors
	Coping mechanisms	• Responding to challenging working conditions and situations by using selective, rationing, and burdensome procedures that can lead to bureaucratic deprivation of their entitlements (e.g., deliberate profiling or categorisation of undeserving clients).
„INFORMAL AND UNINTENTIONAL" based on self-referentiality and errors	Self-referentiality of line workers	• Workers try to act according to rules rather than real or intended results, thus neglecting citizens, abandoning common sense, and substituting goals.
	Administrative errors	• Registration or procedural unintentional errors by staff or citizens that impact citizens and cause burdens in the form of the need to correct the error or unjustifiable loss of benefits or rights by citizens; usually the provision of incorrect information, loss of important documents, misinterpretation of required information, or lack of correct or complete information, incorrect application of rules or misunderstanding of rules.

Source: author based on Peeters (2020)

Figure 3.9 Organisational origins of administrative burden



Source: Peeters (2020:582)

In recent years, this framework has been widely cited and used, and has also served as a source of inspiration for the creation of new analytical tools dealing with administrative burdens (e.g., Doughty & Baehler, 2020; Dupuy & Defacqz, 2022; Campbell, Pandey & Arnesen, 2023; Halling & Bækgaard, 2023; Herd et al., 2023; Tarshish, 2024; Baekgaard, Halling & Moynihan, 2025).

3.2.5 The Formal Model of Street-level Bureaucracy

Ahrum Chang (2022) attempted to explain the mechanisms underlying line workers' behaviour in state administration through the so-called "Formal Model of Bureaucracy". She intended to find out ***how line workers are motivated to approach the public (citizens) and to what extent they are committed to helping them, while dealing with the constraints imposed by demanding working conditions.*** In this model, the behaviour of line bureaucrats is limited mainly by two broad "job conditions", which are (i) the availability of material, immaterial and personal resources to workers in a given

organisation in the first two cases and that they have at their disposal in the last case and (ii) the amount of authority conferred on them "from above" that determine the extent of discretion they have. At the same time, in creating this model, Chang assumed that (iii) line bureaucrats have a desire to serve the general public based on theories of public service motivation (Perry & Wise, 1990; Perry, Hondeghem & Wise, 2010; Perry, 2014, 2021; Tu et al., 2023; Klatt & Fairholm, 2023; Ballart & Ripoll, 2024; Liu, Zhang & Meng, 2025; Ahmad et al., 2026).

The essence of this model is ***to monitor the "costs" and "benefits" of the behaviour of bureaucrats as rational actors who try to maximise their "utility"*** (Brehm & Gates, 1994, 1997). "Costs" usually include (i) psychological or physical strain in the form of stress, (ii) money, (iii) time, and other immeasurable efforts involved in (iv) acquiring information, (v) additional knowledge, and (vi) capabilities to complete a given task. "Benefits" can, on the other hand, take the form of (i) improving their reputation/prestige, (ii) receiving promotions, and (iii) being rewarded personally, perhaps including convenience, security, or even bribery. "Utility" is, in view of the above assumption, defined more broadly than "self-interest", namely as "a set of outcomes valued by the bureaucrats". These include primarily reducing job-related stress, pursuing work-generated ends, serving needy citizens, and implementing sound public policy.

The benefit of this model is that ***it allows for capturing the different types of line bureaucrats proposed by Downs (1967)***[65], ***who differ in whether they are driven by selfish or altruistic motives in achieving their multiple goals.*** While line workers pursue their own interests in making decisions to achieve specific goals, they also pursue the interests and needs of citizens in other cases. They try to "find a satisfactory balance between the realities of the job and personal fulfilment" (Lipsky 2010: xvi). The complex trade-offs between these goals then lead to heterogeneous motivations for bureaucratic behaviour. As a result, some bureaucrats may be wholly or partially motivated by self-interest, while other bureaucrats are motivated by altruism or have prosocial intentions that seek the

[65] Downs (1967) identified *five types of public officials*: (i) climbers and (ii) conservers, driven by self-interest, and (iii) advocates, (iv) zealots, and (v) statesmen, driven by both self-interest and altruism. While climbers are likely to maximize their power, income, and authority, conservatives are likely to maintain their current power.

benefit of others (for more details, see Lejano & Kan, 2020; Litchfield et al., 2023; An, Yu & Tan, 2025; Cohen & Lazebnik, 2025).

3.3. Usability of the Presented Conceptual Tools

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, we used the analytical tools presented above as inspiration and key sources of information, including variables that informed the construction of our "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers". We present it in the following Chapter 4 and subsequently use it to analyse labour market policy in the Czech Republic in Chapter 5. Their contribution lies in the fact that, in the above-mentioned chronological order, they allow us to examine the following aspects of public policy implementation formulated in the form of research questions and to identify the factors that influence it:

- ***Who, where, and what does the policy implementation process do within the entire public policy system, or for what activities is it responsible?*** (Hill and Hupe´s "Multiple Governance Framework");
- ***What factors of the organisational environment of local implementing organisations influence the behaviour of line workers during the provision of public services?*** (Jewell and Glaser´s "General Analytical Framework");
- ***How do interactions between workers and clients, characteristics of implementing organisations, and the broader social context, as well as the factors that encompass them, interact and how can they influence the results of this action, and thus how public policy is implemented?*** (Rice´s "Micro-institutional Model of Policy Implementation");
- ***What specific types of formal or informal, intentional or unintentional administrative burdens which originate from the design or structure of policies, organisations, procedures, employee behaviour, or employee or client error rates affect the way line workers implement policies?*** (Peeters´ "Theoretical framework for analysing organisational causes of administrative burdens"); and
- ***How do available resources and powers, costs and benefits, and diverse motivations affect the behaviour of different types of line workers in government organisations***

when dealing with clients, and thus the way public policy is implemented? (Chang´s "Formal model of bureaucracy").

II. METHODOLOGICAL PART

Chapter 4

“ORGANISATIONAL MODEL OF PUBLIC POLICY IMPLEMENTATION BY FRONTLINE WORKERS”: METHOD OF ITS CONSTRUCTION AND EXPECTED BENEFITS

It follows from the previous chapters that the topic of this work is an attempt to build on unique studies in the field of public policy implementation, which deal with *contextual factors that influence the practices of various types of line workers employed in public administration, so-called "line bureaucrats", who, in the environment of different types of state organisations at the line level, so-called "line bureaucracies", participate in the implementation of public and social policies* by trying to provide public services and achieve various public tasks within the framework of the powers entrusted to them and the degree of autonomy and freedom to make their own judgments, while interacting face to face with various types of citizens and using specific work procedures (bureaucratic, professional, bureau-professional, managerial or mixed) and various official more or less digitized technologies.

The uniqueness of our topic lies in the fact that the vast majority of studies focused on line workers in state administration are more concerned with what line bureaucrats have in common, what their self-concept is, what space they have for independent decision-making (discretion), what influences it and how they use it, how they deal with demanding working conditions and how they approach different types of clients. However, ***previous studies have paid little attention to a broader range of contextual factors that influence the implementation of public policy by line bureaucrats, and thus the actual process of providing public services and their final form*.**

However, the institutional arrangement of the "street-level bureaucracy", which influences the way in which line bureaucrats provide public services, is significant because the contexts of implementation of individual public and social policies logically differ, not only between individual countries and systems of political administration, e.g., in terms of their institutional design, relationships between actors or prevailing political cultures, etc., but also between individual local organisations implementing the same type of public policy within individual states (see e.g., Půček et al., 2026).

The need to reflect contextual factors has become particularly important in recent decades due to the introduction of new ways of managing public administration, which affect not only its structure, and therefore the institutional arrangement of line organisations, but also the processes within it, including the activities of individual line bureaucrats and other workers who manage them or with whom they interact for various reasons.

As we have already stated in the introduction and indicated several times in previous chapters, ***the primary goal of this work was to create a conceptual tool, which we call the "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers", which would allow us to identify and evaluate the widest possible complexes of interconnected factors that influence the way in which line bureaucrats implement public and social policies in a given organisational environment and thus the resulting form of public services provided to various groups of citizens that have a direct or mediated influence on regional and social development.*** Specifically, these are complexes of factors that primarily influence (i) the "discretion" of line workers as the space they have available for independent decisions on how to deal with clients and what services they will provide them and at the same time (ii) the "modes of public service provision" chosen by the workers, which represent the real use of discretion by line workers in solving the needs and problems of diverse clients using bureaucratic, professional, bureau-professional, managerial, or mixed working practices. We believe that identifying key factors that influence how a specific policy is implemented at the local level by street-level bureaucrats and, in turn, the form of the services provided, and determining the extent of their influence, has two benefits: it enables (i) to understand why the policy is implemented at the local level in a given way and at the same time (ii) to focus on specific factors and, by changing their parameters, influence the way the policy is implemented and thus the resulting form of the public services provided, so that the desired regional and social development occurs.

During the construction of our analytical tool, we did not use a systemic perspective at all levels of public policy, which allows, for example, to identify clusters of diverse factors in the field of public administration, profession and society at their different levels (macro-/system, meso-/organisation and micro-/individuals), as Hupe and Buffat (2014) did

following the example of Hupe and Hill (2007)[66]. Instead, ***we sought to develop the most comprehensive conceptual tool focused on processes occurring exclusively within local implementing organisations, capturing the key factors that can influence the implementation of public policy at the line level, which line bureaucrats view as a "client problem-solving process".*** We examined this process through our "heuristic phase model", which represents the process of providing services by line workers and includes several interconnected activities/phases that begin with identifying the client's problem and continue through the selection of tools to solve it, to the evaluation of their impact on the problem being solved.

We have divided the following text into three subchapters. First, we explain the construction method and the resulting form of the "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers" we created (subchapter 4.1). Subsequently, we present the individual areas of factors shaping this model as figures, each containing references to relevant literature that legitimise the selection of factors in these areas and their suitability (subchapter 4.2). In the conclusion, we briefly present the expected benefits of this model (subchapter 4.3).

The findings presented in these subchapters will provide answers to the following questions:

- ***"How is it constructed, and what is the final form of the Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers created by us?"***
- ***"What literature and in what way support the appropriateness of the selection of factors contained in the individual areas of this model?"***[67]
- ***"What are the expected benefits of the Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers?"***

[66] Hupe and Hill (2007) used a typology of accountability regimes to compare the implementation of policies at the line level across countries and organisations.

[67] These areas of factors shaping the resulting model are: (1) „Problem" solved by line workers, (2) "Capacities and motivation of line workers", (3) "Organisational resources" available to line workers, (4) "Policy of organisation" focused on personnel and organisational resources and line workers' perception and solution of the problem, and (5) "External actors" influencing organisational policy and line workers' implementation of the policy.

4.1 "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers" to Understand the Ways of Public Service Delivery by Line Bureaucrats: An Explanation of its Construction

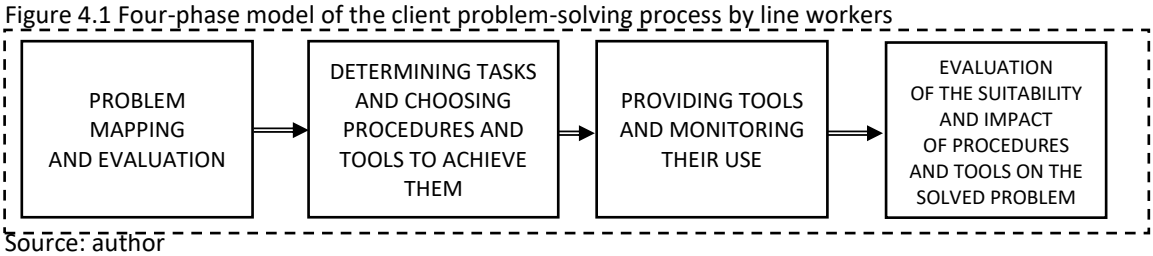
As already mentioned, the "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers" presented in this chapter was created in an attempt to provide an analytical tool that would be able to identify the broadest possible complexes of factors that have the potential to influence work procedures to a greater or lesser extent in practice and thus the resulting method of providing public services by line bureaucrats within the framework of a specific implemented public policy. In this context, *the model we propose contains three interconnected topics*, which are: (i) the "process" of providing public services, (ii) the "ways/forms" of providing public services, and (iii) the "factors" that influence the process and thus the mode of providing public services.

The "process" of providing public services is the set of procedures used by line workers to address specific clients' problems, which often differ in their needs and life circumstances. Although clients' problems and solutions are diverse and unique, service provision can be viewed as a simplified, regularly recurring process comprising several logically interconnected phases. Based on the available literature[68] and our own empirical experience, it is possible, in our opinion, to divide this process, especially in the case of labour market policy, into seven interconnected phases[69]. Given the interconnectedness of the first and second, third and fourth, and fifth and sixth phases, this model can be simplified to a four-phase model, shown in Figure 4.1.

[68] Van Berkel and van der Aa (2012), similarily like us, divide the process of activation work of line workers implementing welfare-to-work policies into several phases, which are: (i) "problem analysis" by assessing the client's problem used to create an individual activation plan, (ii) "tool selection" (a suitable activation program) and organizing recommendations for this program, (iii) "monitoring" the client's progress in the program, (iv) "counselling", (v) "placement of the employee in the workplace", (vi) "sanctions" in case of non-compliance with agreed procedures, and (vii) "paperwork" representing various administrative tasks.

[69] Specifically, these are the following phases: (1) the problem and its mapping, (2) problem assessment, (3) setting tasks to solve it, (4) choosing tools to achieve the tasks, (5) providing services, (6) monitoring the use of tools, and (7) evaluating the impact of the tools on the problem solved.

Figure 4.1 Four-phase model of the client problem-solving process by line workers



Source: author

The figure shows that the client problem-solving process includes the following phases:

1) ***"Problem mapping and evaluation"***. Its essence lies in a line worker's initial identification and subsequent analysis of client information to understand the client's life situation, problems, and needs.

2) ***"Determining tasks and choosing procedures and tools to achieve them"***. This phase consists of the initial decision on the goals that can be achieved for a given client, and the subsequent decision on which specific services - tools and measures - or in what order, to provide under given conditions to a concrete type of client in a particular life situation.

3) ***"Providing tools and monitoring their use"***. This phase primarily concerns the method of delivering specific types of services provided by the line worker's organisation, external state or non-state entities, or a mix of these organisations, and then monitoring their use by the client, which the line worker carries out and most often also by his/her superior employee, or employees, i.e., line manager and/or senior manager.

4) ***"Evaluation of the suitability and impact of chosen procedures and tools on the solved problem"***. The essence of this phase is the control of the chosen procedures and effects/impacts of the provided services in forms of tools and measures on the solved life situation, problems and needs of the given client, which is carried out by the line worker, superior employee or employees (managers) or an external entity which is in charge of a given type of public policy, or the proper use of the funds spent. The resulting findings may confirm or modify the procedures used in the previous phases.

While the first three phases can in some cases be implemented during the initial contact between the line worker and the client, usually depending on the type of

departmental policy implemented[70], the complexity of the problem being solved, and the worker's time capacity, the last phase is usually implemented with a certain time lag.

The primary significance of the analytical view of public service provision as a process of solving a client's problem, consisting of various phases, is, in our opinion, essential for two reasons. (i) First of all, this conceptualisation allows us *to focus on and identify specific factors that influence the individual phases of this process and the degree of their influence*. In addition to line workers' own capacities and the organisational resources available to them for working with clients, there may be other external factors that directly or indirectly influence perceptions of the problem, including client categorisation, work procedures, and the evaluation of work outcomes. This may include, in particular, the interests, expectations, and/or strategies of various intra-organisational actors (i.e., managers, colleagues, other workers from different job positions in the hierarchy of the organisation) or extra-organisational actors (i.e., politicians, media, client interest groups, professional groups, scientists/researchers, or citizens) (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3 below). (ii) Secondly, this conceptualisation enables the identification of specific *factors and clusters of factors and the extent to which they influence how services are provided at individual stages of the problem-solving process* (see below).

The "mode of providing services" by line workers can take various forms. Traditionally, this involves distinguishing between "bureaucratic", "professional", and "bureau-professional" approaches to solving client problems by line workers, which in some countries have been influenced by the principles of "managerialism" since the mid-1980s to the present. These approaches (briefly presented in Chapter 2.1.5) can be characterised in more detail as follows:

- ***The "bureaucratic approach"*** is characterised by impersonal behaviour, which is a manifestation and consequence of the tendency of workers to adhere to predetermined legislative and organisational rules and norms, which also determine their qualifications and powers. The key characteristics of the bureaucratic approach can be considered in particular (i) an impersonal and routine approach based on, (ii)

[70] The practices of line workers may differ more or less depending on whether they are carrying out an agenda within security, criminal, migration, or human rights and freedoms policy, family, education, health, or employment policy, or regional or environmental policy.

providing lower-quality services to the most significant possible number of clients, (iii) promoting officially established, general and vague goals of public programs (Horák, 2008b), (iv) favouritism of selected clients (Lipsky, 1980), (v) unilateral dealings with clients, (vi) solving cases by following predetermined procedures, (vii) providing exclusively material assistance to clients, and (viii) solving controversial cases and situations by not intervening (Musil, 2004; cf. Thomann & Lieberherr, 2023).

- ***The "professional approach"*** is characterized by individual behaviour focused on the client's life situation, which is a manifestation and consequence of the tendency of workers, usually – but not always – members of a specific profession with specialized knowledge and the power to control and organize their work, to help clients in ways that may be contrary to legislative and organisational rules and norms. The key characteristics of the professional approach can be considered (i) a personal and non-routine approach, (ii) the provision of quality services to a smaller number of clients, (iii) the simplification of officially established general and vague goals according to one's own ideas (Horák, 2008b), (iv) a neutral approach to all clients (Lipsky, 1980), (v) a symmetrical relationship with clients, (vi) solving cases according to their specific situation, (vii) the provision of material and non-material assistance, and (viii) the solution of controversial cases and situations by interventions (Musil, 2004; cf. Ray, 2024).
- ***The "bureau-professional approach"*** is a combination of the two approaches mentioned above, specifically the tendency to adhere to pre-established legal and organisational rules and norms ensuring rational management of the organisation and impartiality towards clients and at the same time the tendency to help clients through specialized knowledge and professional expertise of the specific life situation of individual clients (for more details see Clark & Newman, 1997; Harris 1998, 2018; Horák, 2008b)[71].

[71] Bureau-professionalism is based on the rational administration of bureaucratic systems and, at the same time, on the professional expertise of the services provided (Harris, 1998) because bureaucratic administration was supposed to guarantee social impartiality and professionalism by using specialised knowledge in the course of providing individual services (Clark & Newman, 1997). Although there are opinions that the principles of professionalism and bureaucracy are not necessarily in opposition, in practice there is often: (i) a "bureaucrat's inclination to use professional principles", when in addition to administrative tasks, he also has a duty, for example, to look after the welfare of program users, assist them and refer them to individual organisations, or (ii) a "professional's inclination to bureaucratic principles", when his work is significantly influenced by the environment of a state organisation, which requires the application of

- ***The "Managerial approach"*** consists of the systematic management, coordination, and control of methods and techniques, and the actual work performance of line workers by managers who monitor the resulting efficiency and effectiveness of the tools used in relation to achieving predetermined goals[72]. Although the influence of managerialism on line workers' actions appears quite significant, it affects which work techniques are used rather than how they are implemented (Van der Hoek & Kuipers, 2024).

When examining ***the "factors influencing the process" of solving a client problem***, which is the way public services are delivered at the line level, it is important to identify all the key factors that directly or indirectly influence this process. Based on the relevant literature dealing with the concepts of street-level bureaucracy, discretion, and professionalism that capture these themes (see Chapters 1 and 2), we found that the way/form of how public services are delivered, and therefore the way line workers behave, can be significantly influenced by the following five interconnected areas of factors (cf. e.g., May & Winter, 2009; Meyers & Nielsen, 2012; Gilson, 2015; Ferreira & Medeiros, 2016; Cohen, 2018; Lavee, Cohen & Nouman, 2018; Andreotti, Coletto & Rio, 2023; Rossi, Tuurnas & Stenvall, 2025)[73]:

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bureaucratic principles. In many respects, line workers represent (iii) "hybrids" (Stevenson, 1972) because they combine professional and bureaucratic styles of client interaction (Blau & Scott, 1963; for more details, see Horák, 2008b).

[72] Criticism of the bureaucratic approach to the provision of public services has led, in many developed countries since the mid-1980s, to the introduction of managerialism into state administration within the framework of New Public Management. First of all, there was a change in the way state institutions were organised as a result of the introduction of the so-called "managerial model of social service organisation", which consisted of the information domination of management over line workers, and thus in the omnipresent control of their work (Harris 1998, 2002, 2018). Furthermore, market mechanisms were introduced into the public sector, including quasi-markets (Clark & Newman, 1997; Harris, 1998). The introduction of market mechanisms is related to decentralisation (which provides line workers with sufficient autonomy and makes them fully responsible for their activities), the limitation of management of local organisations by central governments, the privatisation of public services, and denationalisation. The introduction of quasi-markets is related to the application of the so-called "contract model", or with processes during which part of the services provided were transferred to the private sector with the justification that they would be more economically efficient, there would be a reduction in bureaucratization, support for innovation and greater sensitivity of line workers to the needs of clients (Hasenfeld, 1983).

[73] Existing studies, according to Gilson (2015), point to four main categories of factors that shape the behaviour of line bureaucrats. These are (i) "individual decision-maker characteristics" as a result of professional norms, personal interests, moral values, gender, ethnicity, roles and personal meanings, (ii) "organisational characteristics" shaped by internal structure, rules and constraints, organisational routines and culture, workload pressures, (iii) "client characteristics" based on levels of need or perceptions, and (iv) "extra-organisational factors" including wider community, laws, regulations, media and other service organisations.

- ***The nature of the "problem" solved***, consisting of the needs, problems, and expectations of various types of clients from the services provided;
- ***"Line workers' capacities"*** solving the clients' problem in the form of education, work motivation, personal dispositions, work experience, further education, and ideas and values;
- ***Available "organisational resources"*** that line workers have at their disposal to solve problems in the form of personnel, space, time, legislative, technological, information, communication, and financial resources;
- ***"Organisation policy"*** promoting a particular type of management of intra-organisational processes, which affects the recruitment and strengthening of employee capacities, organisational resources, perception, and methods of solving client problems by workers and their control; and
- ***The interests, expectations, and strategies of various "external actors"***, which relate to the perception of the client problem, the process of solving it, the suitability of the management principles applied in the organisation, line workers and their capacities, and organisational resources.

These represent five key areas of factors that significantly influence the process/method of service provision, which are located (i) at the interface between the implementing organisation and the external environment, i.e. factors related to the client "problem" being solved, (ii) within the implementing organisation, i.e. "intra-organisational factors" and (iii) outside the implementing organisation, i.e. "extra-organisational/external factors".

It can be assumed that intra-organisational factors and factors at the interface between the organisation and the external environment will have a more immediate, and thus direct, influence on the process of providing public services than extra-organisational

Another classification is offered by May and Winter (2009), who argue that four distinct sets of influences influence the activities of line bureaucrats in policy implementation: (i) "signals by political and administrative superiors" in the form of policy statements and instructions about the content and importance of the policy, (ii) "organisational implementation machinery", which provides organisational, managerial and administrative orders as well as the scope of delegated powers that influence the scope of line discretion, (iii) "knowledge and attitudes of the street-level bureaucrats" about relevant tasks, their work situation and clients, and (iv) "contextual factors" concerning workload, client mix and other external pressures.

factors, which are assumed to have a more indirect influence. The individual areas and their corresponding factors are included in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 Areas and specific factors influencing the process and the resulting method of providing public services

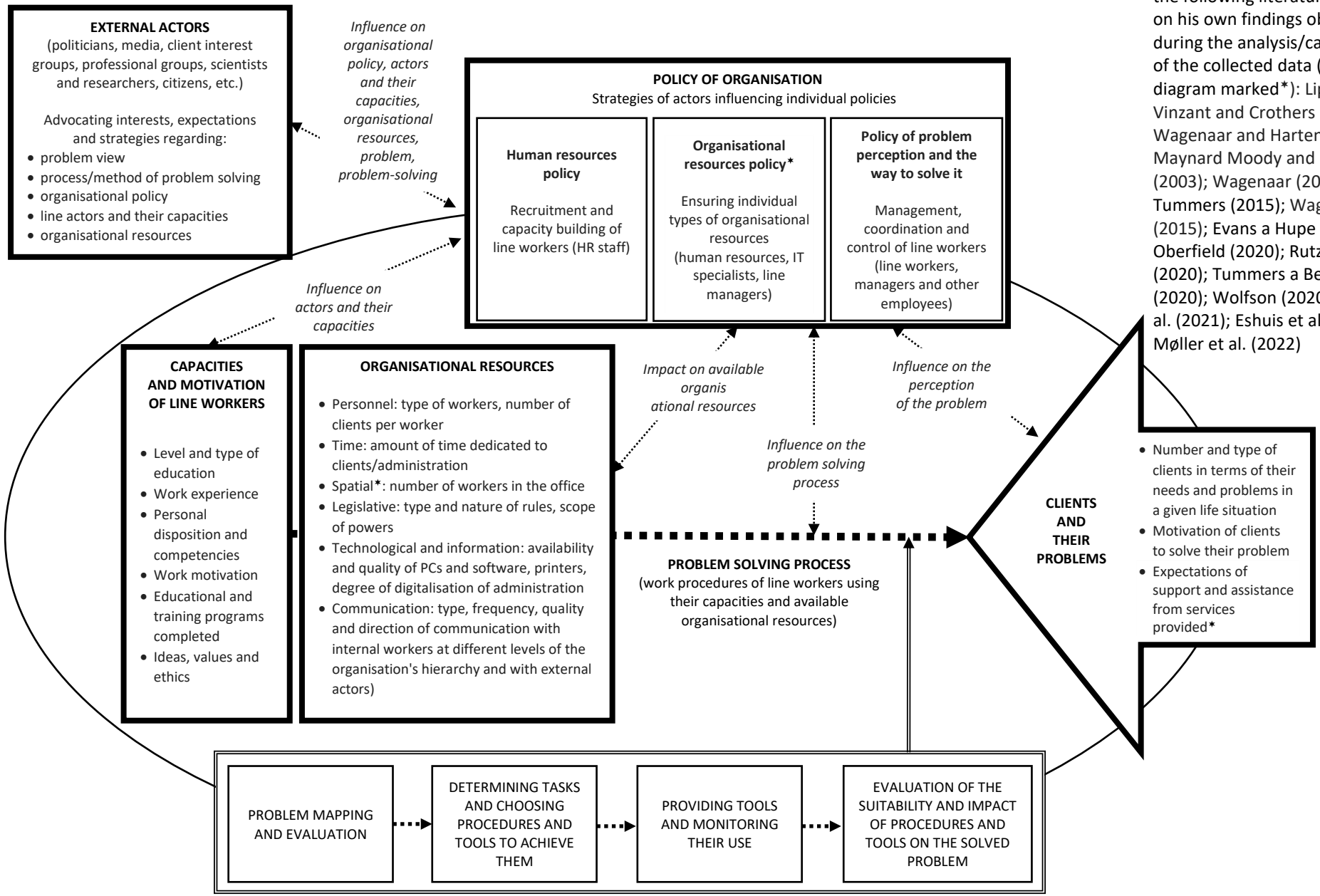
AREAS	FACTORS
1. PROBLEM: clients and their needs and problems, interests and expectations	• Type and number of clients in terms of their needs and problems • Motivation of clients to solve their problem • Expectations of support and help from the services provided*
2. LINE ACTORS: internal capacities	• Level and type of education • Work motivation • Personal disposition/internal competencies • Skills/type and length of work experience • Training completed • Ideas, values , and ethics
3. ORGANISATIONAL RESOURCES: working conditions	• Human resources (type of workers, number of clients per worker) • Spatial resources (number of workers in the office)  • Time resources (amount of time devoted to clients/administration) • Legislative resources (type and nature of rules used, scope of powers) • Technological and information resources (availability and quality of ICT, degree of digitalisation of administration) • Communication resources (type, frequency, quality, and direction of communication inside and outside the organisation) • Financial resources (salary level, financial benefits)
4. ORGANISATIONAL POLICY: personnel policy, organisational resource policy,* and problem perception and solution management policy	• Strategies of actors ensuring recruitment and strengthening of employee capacities (HR professionals) • Strategies of actors ensuring organisational resources (managers, HR professionals, IT specialists) • Strategies of actors influencing the perception of the problem and the processes of its solution by the methods used for management, coordination, and control of intra-organisational processes (various employees, including line workers from different workplaces)
5. EXTERNAL ACTORS: politicians, professional groups, client interest groups, media, scientists/researchers, citizens	Interests, expectations, and strategies related to: • the problem perspective • the problem-solving process • the organisation's policy • the line actors and their capacities • the organisational resources

Source: author based on literature review and results of own investigation (marked*)

The facts mentioned above are illustrated in Figure 4.3, which depicts the resulting "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers" that we developed. It captures the individual phases of the service provision process undertaken

by frontline workers of state organisations, as well as the key areas and factors that influence the methods they use to solve their clients' problems within a given organisational environment.

Figure 4.3 "Organisational model of public policy implementation by frontline workers": the process of providing public services by frontline workers of local implementing organisations and the key areas and factors that influence it in a given organisational environment



Source: author inspired mainly by the following literature and based on his own findings obtained during the analysis/categorization of the collected data (items in the diagram marked*): Lipsky (1980); Vinzant and Crothers (1998); Wagenaar and Hartendorp (2000); Maynard Moody and Musheno (2003); Wagenaar (2004, 2020); Tummers (2015); Wagenaar et al. (2015); Evans a Hupe (2020a) Oberfield (2020); Rutz de Bont (2020); Tummers a Bekkers (2020); Wolfson (2020); Zhang et al. (2021); Eshuis et al. (2023); Møller et al. (2022)

When empirically using this “model”, it is necessary to map not only the five areas of factors listed in Figure 4.3, but also two other areas, which are:

- ***The broader “political and organisational context”*** of the implemented policy, which concerns the characteristics of the administrative system and the implementing organisation, specifically (i) the structure of organisations ensuring the management, administration and implementation of the policy and their objectives, powers and responsibilities and (ii) the types, roles, objectives, powers and responsibilities of employees of local implementing organisations, i.e. managers and line workers; and
- ***The resulting "problem solving process"***, which represents a mapping of specific work procedures used by line workers, which relate to the individual phases listed in Figure 4.1, namely (i) problem mapping and evaluation, (ii) determining tasks and choosing procedures and tools to achieve them, (iii) providing tools and monitoring their use, and (iv) evaluation of the suitability and impact of procedures and tools on the solved problem.

4.2 Areas of Factors Shaping the “Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers” and References to Relevant Literature Legitimising the Proposed Factors

From the above, it follows that ***the "model" we have proposed consists of five key areas of factors that influence the individual phases of the problem-solving process by line workers of local implementing organisations***, or rather the way in which line workers implement public policy, and thus the form in which they provide the resulting public services. To identify the individual factors for these areas, we were primarily guided by the sources listed on the right-hand side of this model (see Figure 4.3 above).

At the same time, we incorporated additional factors into this model based on our analysis of the implementation of labour market policy in selected regions of the Czech Republic (see the following chapters 5 and 6). In addition, we conducted a detailed literature review focused on the implementation of public policy at the line level. A significant source was primarily academic articles published in recent years in prestigious foreign journals, whose results we used to compare the completeness and validity of the factors in our "model" (for more details, see Literature). The results of this analysis for the

individual factors in our proposed model are presented in the following Figures 4.4-4.8 for completeness.

Figure 4.4 Factor Area 1 of the Model ("Problem Solved“) and Literature Focusing on This Area

AREA	FACTORS	LITERATURE
“ PROBLEM” : Clients and their needs and problems, interests, and expectations	Type and number of clients in terms of their needs and problems	CLIENT TYPES: • Seven client types that enhance or weaken SLB trust (“cooperative”, “honest”, “familiar”, “benevolent”, “aggressive”, “open”, and “manipulative”) (Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b) • “Difficult to serve” or “difficult to employ” clients who have multiple barriers (Butler et al., 2012; Soss, Fording & Schram, 2011; McGann, O’Sullivan & Considine, 2022) • Prioritising some clients (Hansen, Pedersen & Willems, 2025) and ignoring others based on stereotypes (Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2018) and creating categories of deservingness and client type - “earned deservingness” for the “hardworking client”, “needed deservingness” for the “needy client”, and “resource deservingness” for the “successful client” (Jilke & Tummers, 2018) • SLBs perceive “long-term benefit recipients” as “unmotivated” (Torbjørnsen, Utne & Løyland, 2024) and apply stricter approaches when activating them (McGann et al., 2020) • Sanctioning clients of other races and ethnicities of SLB (Pedersen et al., 2018) and escalation of conflicts between SLB and clients of different ethnicities (Strier et al., 2021) INTERACTION WITH DIFFERENT CLIENT TYPES: • SLBs use different interaction styles to motivate different types of clients, based on psychological self-determination theory (May and Winter 1999, 2000)[74], which has been developed in recent years into the concept of a four-dimensional interaction style, which includes seven different types of line workers (Parys & Struyven, 2018) • Positive influence of the same gender of the SLB and clients and/or training of the SLB in dealing with clients of the opposite gender, as clients in these constellations show more effort (Guul, 2018) INFLUENCE OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF CLIENTS ON SLB • Client characteristics (Hansen, 2025) and positive or negative behaviour of clients affects the health/well-being and performance of line workers (Szydlowski et al., 2022) NUMBER OF CLIENTS • The high number of clients, who are often forced to use public services involuntarily, increases the workload of SLBs and contributes to the existence of demanding working conditions (Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Maynard-Moody &Musheno, 2003, 2022, et al. – for more details see Chapter 2, subchapter 2.1.1)
	Motivation of clients to solve their problem	CLIENT MOTIVATION TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEM: • Stronger application of activation for “unmotivated” long-term benefit recipients (McGann et al., 2019; Hirseland & Kerschbaumer, 2023)
	Expectations of support and assistance from the services provided*	EXPECTATIONS OF SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE FROM THE SERVICES PROVIDED: • Various types of clients differ in the degree of motivation to solve their life situation and the degree of need for support and assistance from SLB (see Results of our findings in chapter 5, subchapter 5.2.2)

Note: SLB=street-level bureaucrat (line worker)
Source: author based on literature review and the results of your own investigation (marked*)

[74] May and Winter (1999, 2000) distinguished three types of motivation (calculated, social, and normative) and three dimensions of interaction style (empathy, formalism, and coercion).

Figure 4.5a Factor Area 2 of the Model ("Internal Capacities of Line Workers“) and Literature Focusing on This Area

AREA	FACTORS	LITERATURE
"LINE ACTORS": Internal capacities	Level and type of education attained	EDUCATION/PROFESSION/KNOWLEDGE: • The influence of professional standards on the way line workers exercise discretion (Keiser, 1999; Harrits, 2009) and at the same time the importance of expertise and professional power (Harrits, 2019) and professionalism (Da Roit & Busacca, 2024) on the “reconfiguration of professional work in changing public services” (Noordegraaf & Steijn, 2013) • Knowledge, skills, experience, and codes of conduct and their control shape the professionalism of SLB (Noordegraaf, 2007) EDUCATION AND PROFESSION: • Currently, two trends are observed in SLBs implementing employment policy: (1) the mixed use of professional and bureaucratic elements by workers with different education and professions who have specific skills and experiences that allow them to actively respond to specific situations, attitudes and behaviours of diverse client groups (Lavitry, 2017; Nothdurfter, 2017; van Berkel 2017b, 2019; Breit et al., 2024) and (2) the frequent limitation of the space for the application of professional standards and guidelines by SLBs (Peeters & Campos, 2022), where SLBs are forced to achieve political and organisational priorities based on the fastest possible integration of clients into the labour market (without using their empowerment) and on sanctioning them (rather than building relationships based on trust) (Kaźmierczak & Rymsza, 2017; Casswell & Larsen, 2017; Halling et al., 2024) • SLBs are typically seen as implementers of “professionalism”, representing heterogeneous groups of people from different professions who acquire, share and use knowledge to deliver services (which are based on partnerships between workers and clients, use innovation and collaboration with internal and external partners, are carried out in accordance with methodologies based on client diagnosis and workers feel responsible for their actions towards superiors, colleagues and clients (van Berkel et al., 2021; Cairney & Toomey, 2024; van Hout et al., 2024) KNOWLEDGE/ATTITUDES/VALUES: • In SLBs, it is possible to distinguish between knowledge as explicit general statements of “know-what” and specific embodied contextual statements of “know-how” (Evans & Hupe, 2020; Hupe, 2025) • Key factors influencing SLB behaviour include their understanding of politics, knowledge, attitudes, and values (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2003; Thomann & LieberherrThomann & Lieberherr, 2023)

Note: SLB=street-level bureaucrat (line worker)
Source: author based on literature review

Figure 4.5b Factor Area 2 of the Model ("Internal Capacities of Line Workers“) and Literature Focusing on This Area (continuation)

AREA	FACTORS	LITERATURE
"LINE ACTORS": Internal capacities	Level and type of education attained	PROFESSIONAL STATUS: • Professional status has a significant impact on SLB discretion, as it influences the extent of freedom exercised by a given professional group and indicates commitment to the values of the profession (Evetts, 2002); key characteristics of professionalism include: (1) an ideology focused on the well-being of service users rather than economic priorities and (2) a degree of control over one's own work (Freidson, 2001; Andreassen & Natland, 2022) THE INFLUENCE OF PROFESSIONAL IDEOLOGIES: • SLBs are professionals who often perceive themselves to be governed by employment or professional/occupational ideologies (Chang & Brewer, 2023), which both justify and guarantee their discretionary authority/power (Crosby, 2025) and are therefore expected to use discretionary judgment adaptively in dealing with their work tasks (Hupe & Hill, 2007)
	Work motivation	WORK MOTIVATION AND SATISFACTION: • The "mirror satisfaction" hypothesis is based on the premise that workers who are satisfied with their jobs perform better, which leads to greater client satisfaction (Petrovsky & Yu, 2022; Petrovsky, Xin & Yu, 2023) • A range of attitudes can be identified in SLBs that relate to their (1) prosocial motivation, (2) work engagement, (3) bureaucratic identity as rule-followers, and (3) self-efficacy (Keulemans & de Walle, 2020b) • The importance of prosocial motivation and job satisfaction for SLBs' perceptions and use of discretion (Henderson et al., 2017; Liao et al., 2022; Almazrouei et al., 2025) MOTIVES: • SLB motives and behaviour are often less categorical, more mixed, and variable depending on the motives and perspectives pursued in different situations (Dean, 2003; Thomann & Lieberherr, 2023) • SLB motives represent combinations of commitments and interests realised in a specific context, which may occur on the moral axis of altruistic action motivated by universal morality versus self-interested action motivated by economic self-interest (Evans, 2014)
	Personal disposition/internal competence	PERSONALITY DISPOSITIONS/INTERNAL COMPETENCES: • Personality characteristics of SLB are important (Bryson et al., 2014; Dufault, MacDonald & Schermer, 2023) • SLB professionalism is often not ensured by belonging to a profession (Döring & Willems, 2023), but by relevant skills and competencies in the sense of the ability to manage communication processes and relationships with clients ("relational competence" and "tendency to psychologize activation work") (Hagelund, 2016) • There is "organisational professionalism" as a discourse of control usually used by managers in organisations to manage work processes, and "occupational professionalism" as a discourse developed by work groups (Fraser, 2025), which emphasises the complexity of discretionary decision-making, collegial powers and the value of trust between practitioners and clients (Evetts, 2006) • There is a gender difference in SLB interests (Tue et al., 2023) and personal attributes (empathy, systematisation, and competitiveness) (Nielsen, 2015; Matjie, 2022)

Note: SLB=street-level bureaucrat (line worker)
Source: author based on literature review

Figure 4.5c Factor Area 2 of the Model ("Internal Capacities of Line Workers“) and Literature Focusing on This Area (continuation)

AREA	FACTORS	LITERATURE
"LINE ACTORS": Internal capacities	Personal disposition/internal competence	PERSONALITY: • The importance of a proactive personality (Henderson et al., 2017; Setyawan, Wahyuni & Ambarwati, 2025) • SLBs are usually workers with diverse interests and attitudes (Vohnsen, 2015; Almazrouei, Bani-Melhem & Mohd-Shamsudin, 2025) COMPETENCE: • Examples of competences of activation workers in the employment sector in Norway are: "basic (understanding) competences", "user-engaging competences" including the ability to dialogue with users and mobilize their experiences and competences, "supervisory competences" consisting of the ability to perform a supervisory role and use methods for individual follow-up, "work and welfare specific competences", "legal competences", "ICT competences" and "multicultural sensitivity" (Hagelund, 2016, cf. Macip-Simó et al., 2025) • A key value of line work is "the ability to respond quickly and qualitatively to the wishes and needs of clients" (Brodkin, 2012; Zacka, 2017; Schnapp, 2024), the ability to “empathize” (Jensen & Pedersen, 2017; Mussagulova, 2026), the ability to “consider the level of knowledge about the client” and the ability to “establish a relationship of trust” between the worker and the client (which allows the identification of the clients’ life situations in their complexity) (Murphy & Skillen, 2015)
	Skills/type and length of work experience	SKILLS/TYPE AND LENGTH OF WORK EXPERIENCE: • “Emotional skills” such as empathy for clients and the ability to regulate unwanted emotions in line workers (Zhang & Adegbola, 2022) are often promoted by managers because they ensure quality performance and prevent burnout (Guy, 2020) • “Emotional intelligence”, consisting of the ability to assess clients’ emotions and work with them (motivate clients), significantly affects worker performance (Eshuis et al., 2023) • SLBs mainly use “individual norms” and previous “professional and work experiences”, which is reflected in the differentiation of practices (van Berkel & van der Aa, 2012) • SLB skills (along with knowledge) represent techniques for understanding and managing feelings, thoughts, and behaviours (Evans, 2020) • An implemented policy represents a text that is open to interpretation and comes to life through its enactment, while SLBs, as actors in a theatre, must use “creative skills” (Gunawan, Hadis & Qur’ani, 2024) that enable imaginative problem-solving and imaginative understanding (Evans & Hupe, 2020) EXPERIENCE: • The importance of years of experience in the perception and use of SLB discretion (Henderson et al., 2017; Hassan et al., 2023b) • SLBs apply in their practices a “background understanding” shared among members of a given community of workers, which is represented by “substructures containing knowledge, experience, assumptions, material and artifactual objects” (Wagenaar, 2020)

Note: SLB=street-level bureaucrat (line worker)
Source: author based on literature review

Figure 4.5d Factor Area 2 of the Model ("Internal Capacities of Line Workers“) and Literature Focusing on This Area (continuation)

AREA	FACTORS	LITERATURE
"LINE ACTORS": Internal capacities	Skills/type and length of work experience	EXPERIENCE: • SLB behaviour is significantly influenced by the type and length of work experience (Peeters & Campos, 2022), which influences how rules are applied (Hansen, 2024) • The correct use of SLB rules in a specific situation and context requires both the individual and collective experience of the community of given line workers (Wagenaar, 2020; Knowles et al., 2023)
	Completed trainings	TRAINING COMPLETED: • SLBs as professionals require, in addition to experience and skills (made up of technical knowledge and soft knowledge) (Eshuis et al., 2023), also completed training (Evans, 2020)
	Ideas, values , and ethics	POLITICAL ORIENTATION: • Liberal versus conservative political ideology of SLBs influences their beliefs about the fairness versus unfairness of administrative burdens imposed on clients and their perceptions of whether they deserve or do not deserve assistance (disagree with burdens because social justice is undermined by limited access to services for clients versus agree with administrative burdens because they prevent fraud and only deserving clients receive services) (Bell et al., 2020) including their job satisfaction and motivation (Piotrowska, 2024) VALUES: • SLB decision-making is often guided by “professional imperatives” (Haynes & Licata, 1995), where “professional commitment and values” together with “employee and professional identities” lead SLBs to make ethical decisions that address rights, responsibilities, and obligations from a moral and value perspective (Banks, 2001; Zacka, 2019) ETHICS: • It is helpful to use an ethics perspective to understand SLB actions (Stensöta, 2019; Møller, Pedersen & Pors, 2022; Lovell, 2024)

Note: SLB=street-level bureaucrat (line worker)
Source: author based on literature review

Figure 4.6a Factor Area 3 of the Model ("Organisational Resources“) and Literature Focusing on This Area

AREA	FACTORS	LITERATURE
"ORGANISATIONAL RESOURCES": Working conditions	HUMAN RESOURCES: Type of line workers, ratio of clients per worker	PERSONNEL RESOURCES: • The problem is frequent staff shortages (Kosar, 2011; Thomann, 2015; Kim, Cho & Kim, 2025) • The literature on public administration points to better management of work problems at the street level if sufficient numbers of SLBs are provided (Dubois, 2016; Tummers et al., 2015), who otherwise face extensive workloads (Scott, 1997; Hill, 2006; Diefenbach, 2009; Brodkin, 2011; Cheng & Wong, 2013; Luran, Adnan & Amirullah, 2025)
	TIME RESOURCES: Amount of time dedicated to clients/administration	TIME RESOURCES: • The problem is frequent lack of time (Kosar, 2011; Thomann, 2015) and time limits (Sainsbury, 2008; Thorén, 2008; Peeters & Campos, 2022) • “Time compression” due to the introduction of new public management significantly limits the implementation of professional judgment of line workers (its consequence may be “task dilution”, e.g., by procrastination strategies, i.e., by postponing administrative and mentally demanding duties and tasks) (Murphy & Skillen, 2015)
	SPATIAL RESOURCES: Number of employees in the office*	SPATIAL RESOURCES • A higher number of SLBs in the office makes it impossible for clients to talk and solve sensitive personal problems (Result of our findings – see for more details chapter 5, subchapter 5.2.5)
	LEGISLATIVE RESOURCES: Type and nature of rules used, scope of powers	LEGISLATIVE SOURCES: • SLBs face both “administrative burden”, the perception of which is influenced by the complexity of rules, autonomy, conformity, job satisfaction, educational attainment and perceived corruption, and “rule burden”, which is a subset of administrative burden and its perception is influenced by the tendency to follow rules, decision-making freedom, job satisfaction, organisational commitment and level of control (Stanica et al., 2022; Madsen, 2024) ORGANISATIONAL RULES AND GOALS: • Organisational rules and goals are often ambiguous or contradictory (Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Bryson, George & Seo, 2024) RULES: • Rules can be incomplete, inappropriate, or vague (Handler, 1986; Vinzant & Crothers, 1998; Cairney, 2025) • Reducing the complexity of rules contributes to increasing organisational performance and improving the services provided (Stanica et al., 2020; Haag, Hurka & Kaplaner, 2025)

Note: SLB=street-level bureaucrat (line worker)
Source: author based on literature review and the results of your own investigation (marked*)

Figure 4.6b Factor Area 3 of the Model ("Organisational Resources“) and Literature Focusing on This Area (continuation)

AREA	FACTORS	LITERATURE
"ORGANISATIONAL RESOURCES": Working conditions	TECHNOLOGICAL AND INFORMATION RESOURCES: Availability and quality of ICT, degree of digitalisation of administration	INFORMATION SOURCES: • SLBs often face limited information (Brehm & Gates, 1999; Riccucci et al., 2004) or a lack of information (Kosar, 2011; Thomann, 2015; Løberg, 2023) TECHNOLOGICAL AND INFORMATION SOURCES: • The expected benefits of introducing modern information technologies through e-government and e-governance initiatives include better decision-making, more intensive and productive use of databases, better communication within and between organisations (Bovaird, 2005; Nwinyokpugi & Bestman, 2020), and a reduction in administrative burdens by streamlining citizens' access to digital services (Alshallaqi & Al-Mamary, 2024). • The intensive use of ICT and digital transformation (Ahn & Chen, 2022) can serve as additional resources for negotiations between workers and service users (the "enablement thesis") or, conversely, reduce or completely limit workers' discretion (the "curtailment thesis") (Buffat, 2015a). • When introducing ICT in the form of system bureaucracies in which system analysts and software designers completely replace line bureaucrats (Ahn & Chen, 2022), perfect implementation of laws is ensured, but at the same time, there is a loss of fairness in resolving complex cases (Bovens & Zouridis, 2002) • ICT affects the relationships between superiors and subordinates (Shao et al., 2024), and thus the way in which line workers exercise discretion, as discretion is linked at the system and street levels (Alshallaqi, 2022). • The digitalisation of services, which completely replaces the face-to-face contact of line workers with clients (so-called "machine bureaucracy"), should increase efficiency, accountability, and consistency in policy delivery (Considine et al., 2022), which is also the case when using AI interactions (Jung & Camarena, 2025). • Although the technical problems of newly introduced ICT cause stress for SLBs (Rohwer et al., 2022), they try to be accommodating to clients, adapt rules to them, work overtime, and cooperate to help clients (Tummers & Rocco, 2018). • On the one hand, ICT can reduce the scope of SLBs' actions, contribute to their stricter control, and lead to a decrease in their skills (Marienfeldt, 2024), or, on the contrary, increase their scope of actions (Lekkas & Souitaris, 2023), as they must suddenly provide a broader range of services (Schuppan, 2015).

Note: SLB=street-level bureaucrat (line worker)
Source: author based on literature review

Figure 4.6c Factor Area 3 of the Model ("Organisational Resources“) and Literature Focusing on This Area (continuation)

AREA	FACTORS	LITERATURE
"ORGANISATIONAL RESOURCES": Working conditions	COMMUNICATION RESOURCES: Type, frequency, quality, and direction of communication within and outside the organisation	COMMUNICATION BETWEEN WORKERS AND WITH CLIENTS: • The significant influence of interaction and communication between workers (Schnapp, 2024) and between workers and clients on their decision-making (Raaphorst & Loyens, 2020), on discretionary judgment (Rutz & de Bont, 2020), on the perception of clients and the way they deal with them (Keulemans & de Walle, 2020b), and on facilitating collective action among workers and supporting informal accountability (Romzek, LeRoux and Blackmar 2012) • The influence of mutual transfer of experience between line managers (Bashir & Masood, 2024) and colleagues in the workplace on creative discretion and service provision, thereby developing policy (Visser & Kruyen, 2021) • Working relationships between different line workers and especially repetitive interactions between peers serve (Nisar & Maroulis, 2017): (1) to transfer information and knowledge that allow learning how to solve different things (Oberfield, 2014; Siciliano, 2015), how to implement some new activities when implementing reforms or innovations (Andersen & Jakobsen, 2016), (2) to shape the expected role, (3) to strengthen group identity, (4) to provide emotional support that allows coping with stressful work environments (e.g., Brehm & Gates, 1999; Goodsell, 1981; Keiser, 2010; Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Mischen & Jackson, 2008; Oberfield, 2014; Sandfort, 2000; Vinzant & Crothers, 1998) and to reduce negative emotions (Hsieh, 2014; Xerri, Cozens & Brunetto, 2023) • Workgroups with clear direction and reflective behaviour have been shown to have a greater impact on team learning (Foldy & Buckley, 2009) • Communication between existing employees and newly hired employees is a process of socialisation that serves to adapt them to each other (Awwad et al., 2024), but does not ensure complete agreement on attitudes (Moyson et al., 2018) COMMUNICATION OF SLB AND MANAGERS: • The influence of the way managers communicate on the willingness of line workers to follow rules has been proven by directly observing their behaviour or increasing the clarity of the rules (Zada et al., 2023), and the threat of punishment for non-compliance (Zhang et al., 2021) • The acceptance of compassionate/empathetic feelings from managers such as affection, generosity, care and tenderness (the so-called “compassion model”) increases their work engagement, reduces the risk of burnout, leads to the sharing of organisational citizenship behaviour and knowledge, the implementation of compassionate behaviour towards clients and the reduction of stress caused by large client numbers and administrative burdens (Eldor, 2017; Sciepura & Linos, 2022) • The importance of the extent to which managers clearly communicate goals with SLB and expectations about how to deal with different situations (Hill, 2006; Riccucci et al., 2004; Lee, 2022)

Note: SLB=street-level bureaucrat (line worker)
Source: author based on literature review

Figure 4.6d Factor Area 3 of the Model ("Organisational Resources“) and Literature Focusing on This Area (continuation)

AREA	FACTORS	LITERATURE
"ORGANISATIONAL RESOURCES": Working conditions	COMMUNICATION RESOURCES: Type, frequency, quality and direction of communication within and outside the organisation	COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ORGANISATIONS AND SECTORS: • Benefits of collaboration between state and non-state organisations to create innovative service design (so-called collaborative innovation) (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011, 2016; Torfing, 2019, 2023; Trein, Presset & Vagionaki, 2025) that have positive services for their collaborating users (Lindsay et al., 2020; Lopes & Farias, 2022) • In recent years, there has been an integration of client-centred services based on a holistic approach (Montero et al., 2016; Eriksson & Johansson, 2022) through multidisciplinary cooperation of actors in networks formed across organisations and sectors to provide alternative or additional services based on shared decisions within a common discretionary space that allows the development of an appropriate combined approach that will respond to the diverse needs of service users and that will result in the frequent need to cope with, adapt to or deviate from diverse sectoral rules (Ruzt & de Bont, 2020; Vogel et al., 2022) • In recent years, there has been a trend in many countries of the increasing number of interactions between various state agencies and other public, private, and non-profit sector organisations, which can be described as the hybridisation of line bureaucracy (Klenk & Cohen, 2019) and which is based on hybrid governance (Hupe & Meijs, 2000; Vakkuri et al., 2021; Torfing et al., 2025) and hybrid professionalism (Noordegraaf, 2015, 2019; Breit et al., 2024)
	FINANCIAL RESOURCES: Salary, financial benefits	FINANCIAL RESOURCES: • The problem is frequent insufficient financial resources (Hupe & van der Krogt, 2014), “budget cuts” and subsequent adoption of austerity measures by many governments (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017) THE PROBLEM OF EMPLOYEE BURNOUT: • Increased likelihood of line workers burning out when there is a high administrative burden (Mikkelsen, Madsen & Baekgaard, 2023) and/or low remuneration (Hsieh, 2014; Tu et al., 2023)

Note: SLB=street-level bureaucrat (line worker)
Source: author based on literature review

Figure 4.7a Factor Area 4 of the Model ("Organisational Politics“) and Literature Focused on This Area

AREA	FACTORS	LITERATURE
"ORGANISATIONAL POLICY": Personnel policy, organisational resource security policy, and problem perception and solution management policy	PERSONNEL POLICY: Strategies of actors ensuring recruitment and strengthening of employee capacities (human resources professionals)	HUMAN RESOURCE POLICY: • A connection has been demonstrated between personnel policies aimed at strengthening the human capital of SLBs and their impact on their individual (professional) work performance (the focus was on increasing their abilities, motivation, and opportunities) (O'Toole & Meier, 2009; van Berkel, de Vries & Knies, 2021; Larsen, Møller & Raaphorst, 2025) • The development of SLB professional discretion secured in organisations where an internal professional learning mechanism has been set up (Hassan et al., 2023b) serves to bridge the gap between (1) service delivery rules at the policy level and (2) sophisticated individual service needs at the practical level (Zhang et al., 2022) FLUCTUATION OF SLB: • The influence of (1) work exhaustion, (2) work demands (bureaucratic burden, role conflict, work overload), and (3) low motivation to perform public services on the turnover of line bureaucrats has been demonstrated (Shim et al., 2017; Trinchero et al., 2025) • The long-term "emotional demands of work", which are increasingly exposed to some types of SLB (e.g., health workers, firefighters, law enforcement officers, public defenders), increase their turnover, while organisational trust increases with support from superiors and sufficient autonomy reduces this turnover (Cho & Song, 2017; Henderson & Borry, 2023)
	ORGANISATIONAL RESOURCES POLICY*: Strategies of actors providing organisational resources (managers, HR, IT specialists)	POLICY OF ORGANISATIONAL RESOURCES • Providing sufficient resources of various types listed in Figure 4.6a-d significantly affects working conditions, the way of understanding the problem being solved, the knowledge of how to solve it, and thus the resulting way of providing public services (Result of our findings - more details in Chapter 5, subchapter 5.2.6)
	PROCESS MANAGEMENT: Strategies of actors influencing the perception of the problem and the processes of its solution (different employees, including line workers from different workplaces)	PROCESS MANAGEMENT GOALS: • Public administrations in most developed countries of the world focus primarily on delivering performance, which is ensured by “internal” management focused primarily on (1) setting challenging but achievable goals, (2) building trust through credible commitments, (3) supporting employee participation, and (4) providing feedback (Favero et al., 2016; Ferlie & Ongaro, 2022; van der Kolk, 2022) • There are two streams of research focused on the topic of leading people in providing services at the street level: (1) the first deals with how line service providers use discretion in a rule-saturated environment, and (2) the possibilities of managers to influence line work (Henderson & Pandey, 2013; Bovaird & Loeffler, 2022)

Note: SLB=street-level bureaucrat (line worker)

Source: author based on literature review and the results of your own investigation (marked*)

Figure 4.7b Factor Area 4 of the Model ("Organisational Politics“) and Literature Focused on This Area (continuation)

AREA	FACTORS	LITERATURE
"ORGANISATIONAL POLICY": Personnel policy, organisational resource security policy, and problem perception and solution management policy	PROCESS MANAGEMENT: Strategies of actors influencing the perception of the problem and the processes of its solution (different employees, including line workers from different workplaces)	CITIZEN PERCEPTIONS OF PROBLEMS: • SLBs who work in unsupportive organisational environments prioritise clients they do not trust, modify or break rules to help them, while allocating services to clients they trust, even if they pay less attention to them (Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022a) LINE MANAGER INFLUENCE ON SLBs: • Line managers have the opportunity to influence SLBs' behaviour by creating rules and signalling preferred behaviour, and can also influence their knowledge, values, and discretionary behaviour by creating or reducing workload (May & Winter, 2009; Larsen, Møller & Raaphorst, 2025) • Line managers, in their role as supervisors of SLBs, serve as models for attitudes adopted by SLBs, and at the same time, their supportive leadership behaviours serve to promote positive SLB behaviour toward clients (Keulemans & Groeneveld, 2019; Møller & Grøn, 2023) • Line managers often support line workers in devoting more care to motivated clients (Tummers, 2017) INFLUENCE OF SENIOR MANAGERS ON SLB GOALS: • The influence of senior managers (as well as politicians) on the perception of the policy goals has been demonstrated to a limited extent because they are influenced mainly by how these workers understand the goals, what their professional knowledge and political predispositions are (May & Winter, 2007; Bello-Gomez & Avellaneda, 2023) INFLUENCE OF MANAGERS ON SLB WORKING PROCEDURES: • The methods of sanctioning applied by SLB tend to be the result of the policy of the given organisation implemented by its management and are therefore not only the influence of the characteristics and behaviour of clients, but also the influence of the organisational needs, routines, values, authority relations, environment and the reward and punishment system applied in the given organisation (Soss et al., 2011) • Line managers significantly influence the professionalism (Alonso de Andrade & Pekkola, 2024) and the creativity of SLB working procedures (Bashir & Masood, 2024), which increases organisational resilience (Paulikienė, Šimanskienė & Paužuolienė, 2026). IMPACT OF REFORMS ON SLB: • The introduction of the NPM mechanism, which is based on the setting and monitoring of performance indicators, audit, control, and evaluation, and its attempt to increase its accountability to the state and at the same time to the public through marketization and the development of a consumer culture, contributes to time compression and limits the discretion of SLBs based on situational knowledge and trust (Murphy & Skillen, 2015; Cronin, 2023), influences the coping strategies used by SLBs (Casswell & Høybye-Mortensen, 2015), reduces the benefits of policy for clients (Brodkin, 2007, 2011; Diefenbach, 2009; Ellis, 2011; Soss et al., 2011) and can lead to a willingness for SLBs to adapt rules to the benefit of clients (May & Winter, 2009) or, conversely, can lead them to feelings of alienation from politics (Usman et al., 2021), because it requires the application of dysfunctional practices that focus on exclusively on efficiency and results and at the same time are accompanied by a large number of policy changes (laws) and require strict application of rules (Tummers, Bekers & Steijn, 2009; Tummers, 2012, 2017; De Boer & Raaphorst, 2023)

Note: SLB=street-level bureaucrat (line worker)
Source: author based on literature review

Figure 4.8 Factor Area 5 of the Model ("External Actors“) and Literature Focusing on This Area

AREA	FACTORS	LITERATURE
"EXTERNAL ACTORS": Politicians, professional groups, client interest groups, media, scientists/researchers, citizens	Interests, expectations, and strategies related to: • the problem view • the problem-solving process • the organisation's policy • the line actors and their capacities • the organisational resources	POLITICIANS: • Limited influence of politicians (including senior managers) on perceptions of the objectives of national SLB employment reforms (May & Winter, 2007; Bernstein & Rodríguez, 2023) • Limited influence of central policy and politicians on the practices of line bureaucrats who may not respond to demands for increased performance (e.g., in the implementation of New Public Management in the USA) (Brodkin, 2011a; Baekgaard, Blom-Hansen & Serritzlew, 2022) PROFESSIONAL GROUPS: • Written policy does not teach implementers what they should know to implement the policy, but relies on a network of non-state policy professionals (professional associations, academics, trainers, and consultants) to disseminate the policy to implementers (Hill, 2003; Walsh & Ferazzoli, 2025) CLIENT INTEREST GROUPS • Integrated service networks focused on helping clients often include organisations representing the interests of the citizens to whom the SLB provides services (Ruzt & de Bont, 2020; Da Roit & Busacca, 2024) MEDIA • In recent years, the media has indirectly paid increased attention to the activities of SLBs and directly to the senior managers who interact with them (usually a demand for authenticity and exercising discretion in new ways within changing/volatile rules and norms) (Needham, 2020; Erlich et al., 2021) SCIENTISTS/RESEARCHERS • SLBs use limited research knowledge in their decision-making (Bolhaar et al., 2020) CITIZENS/SOCIETY: • Line workers work in “complex contexts” (including, but not limited to, the citizens they come into contact with) that create space for discretionary decision-making and frame and constrain their choices and decisions (also policies and laws, agencies and organisations they work for, supervisors and colleagues, professional associations, other agencies that play a role in policy delivery) (Vinzant & Crothers, 1998; Verlinden et al., 2023) • SLBs are expected to adhere to prescribed procedures (so-called “action rules”) in the provision of services, which represent pressures that include, in addition to (1) formal rules (especially legislative requirements, policy and organisational goals, performance targets), (2) professional norms in the form of work guidelines, (3) societal expectations (Hupe & van der Krogt, 2013; Noordegraaf & Steijn, 2013; Andreotti et al., 2023)

Note: SLB=street-level bureaucrat (line worker)
Source: author based on literature review

4.3 Expected Benefits of the "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers"

The construction of our "model" presented in the previous subchapters 4.1 and 4.2 shows that this analytical tool should make it possible to understand the implementation of public and social policies at the line level in the following areas:

- ***It provides insight into the implementation process itself, i.e., into the "problem solved" by line workers and its individual phases***, some of which may be dominated by the activities and decisions of line workers themselves without the presence of service users, and others may be based on the interaction between line workers and service users; and
- ***It identifies key factors that influence the implementation process and thus the way in which public services are provided, as well as their real form and degree of influence***, the source of which are (i) line workers and their capacities and work motivation, (ii) the organisational resources of various kinds available to them, which shape their working conditions, together with (iv) the organisation's policy in the area of personnel management, organisational resources, the view of the problem being solved and the method of its solution.

Furthermore, as we have already stated in the introduction of this subchapter, identifying key factors and determining the extent of their influence provides additional benefits of the model we have proposed, which consist of the fact that this model allows:

- ***To understand why public policy is implemented at the local level in a given way***, and at the same time; and
- ***To focus on these factors and, by changing their parameters, influence the mode of policy implementation and thus the resulting form of public services provided so that the desired regional and social development in the given locality occurs.***

III. ANALYTICAL PART

Chapter 5

ANALYSIS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LABOR MARKET POLICY IN SELECTED REGIONS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC THROUGH THE "ORGANISATIONAL MODEL OF PUBLIC POLICY IMPLEMENTATION BY FRONTLINE WORKERS"

In this chapter, we present in detail the results of our analysis of the implementation of labour market policy in selected regions of the Czech Republic, using the "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers" that we constructed. We want to show the potential and possible benefits of this model, which we wrote about in the previous chapter and which specifically relate to (i) what insight it offers into the process of providing public services and its individual phases by frontline workers implementing labour market policy and at the same time (ii) what key factors, in what form and to what extent, influence this process (for more details, see Chapter 4, subchapter 4.3).

The following text is structured into two subchapters: methodological and analytical. In the first section, we briefly present the research objective and the data collection and analysis methods we used, particularly the way we applied the model we developed (subchapter 5.1). Subsequently, we present the results of our research (subchapter 5.2). We have organized them into six areas that focus on (i) the political and organisational context of the problem solved, (ii) the problem solved by line workers, (iii) the problem-solving process, (iv) the internal capacities of line workers, (v) the organisational resources available to line workers, and (vi) the organisation's policy shaped both by internal actors and to some extent directly or indirectly also by some external actors.

The findings presented in this analytical part allow us to answer the following questions:

- ***"What is the political and organisational 'context' of the analysed labour market policy in selected regions of the Czech Republic in terms of the form and characteristics of the administration system, workplaces implementing the policy, and goals pursued by line workers when dealing with clients?"***
- ***"What 'problem' do line workers solve in the sense of what groups of clients do they come into contact with, and what are the interests and expectations from the services provided?"***

- ***"How does the 'process of problem solving' by line workers proceed in terms of what work procedures do they use with respect to their capacities, motivations, and available organisational resources?"***
- ***"What are the 'internal capacities of line workers' in terms of their education, work experience, personal dispositions, work motivation, and training completed?"***
- ***"What 'organisational resources' do line workers have available to solve problems related to space for negotiation, time, legislation and powers, technology and information, communication, and financial evaluation?"***
- ***"What is the form of the 'organisational policy' shaped by various external and internal actors that focuses on recruiting and strengthening the capacities of line workers, the resources available to them, and the way they view and solve the problem?"***

5.1 Research Objective, Data Collection, and Data Analysis Method Used

Our research aimed to use the organisational "model" presented in the previous chapter to analyse the implementation of labour market policy in the Czech Republic. The key effort was to use this analytical tool ***to reveal the "process of providing public services" to various groups of unemployed people by line bureaucrats referred to as "line workers" and to identify the degree of influence and nature of specific factors contained in individual areas of the model*** - i.e. in the area of: (i) "clients" and their problems solved by line workers, (ii) "line workers" and their capacities and motivation, (iii) "organisational resources" available to workers, and (iv) "policy of organisation" including human resources policy, organisational resource policy, and policy of problem perception and the way to solve it. At the same time, we tried to (v) identify the influence of "external actors" on the policy of the organisation and, possibly, on the line workers themselves.

To achieve this goal, we used ***interviews with thirty employees of the Labour Office of the Czech Republic*** (hereinafter referred to as "LOoCR") ***from eight different workplaces located in two regional capitals, which are characterised by the highest number of job seekers in the entire Czech Republic*** (we refer to them as "location A" and "location B"). Specifically, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 line workers and 9 senior line managers across two types of workplaces. The first was a workplace implementing the

state employment policy (hereinafter, "LMP"), where 16 line workers and 5 of their superior line managers were interviewed. The second was a workplace implementing an EU-funded regional project focused on young job seekers (graduates) under 30 years of age, where 5 line workers and 4 of their superior managers were interviewed (3 line managers and 1 senior manager) (see Figure 5.1 for more details).

These two *workplaces differed* primarily in three ways: (i) *the scope of the "target groups" of clients* to whom services were provided (all types of clients versus young job seekers), (ii) *the source and nature of the "rules"* that define the job positions, capacities, organisational resources, and work procedures of line workers (exclusively Czech legislation versus Czech legislation and selected European legislation), and (iii) *the "source of funding"* (from the state budget versus from the European Social Fund Plus - hereinafter referred to as "ESF+").

Figure 5.1 Respondents surveyed by job position in location A and location B

LOCATION A	LOCATION B
State Employment Policy Workplaces	
• R1A-R7A: line worker, "advisor-specialist of the employment placement department" • R8A: line worker, "advisor-specialist of the employment placement department", specialist for people with disabilities • R9A MNG: line manager, "head of the employment placement department"	• R15B, R16B: line worker, "advisor-specialist of the employment placement department" from the workplace 1 • R17B, R18B: line worker, "advisor-specialist of the employment placement department" from the workplace 2 • R19B, R20B: line worker, "advisor-specialist of the employment placement department" from the workplace 3 • R21B, R22B: line worker, "advisor-specialist of the employment placement department" from the workplace 4 • R23B – R26B MNG: line manager, "head of the employment placement department" from workplaces 1 to 4
The workplaces implementing a European project	
• R10A MNG: senior manager, "head of the EU Projects Department" • R11A MNG: line manager, "project manager" of the EU RIP Youth Guarantee project • R12A MNG: line manager, "coordinator" of the EU RIP Youth Guarantee project • R13A, R14A: line worker, "labour market expert" of the EU RIP Youth Guarantee project	• R27B, R28B: line worker, "labour market expert" of the EU RIP Youth Guarantee project • R29B MNG: line manager, "project manager" of the EU RIP Youth Guarantee project • R30B: line worker, "administrator" of the EU RIP Youth Guarantee project

Source: author

We specifically used the organisational "model" we designed *by creating an interview scenario for the respondents mentioned above, which enabled us to obtain specific*

information about the individual factors/variables included in the model and the relationships among the areas it captures[75]. We designed the questions to identify new variables or sub-areas within the model during the interviews that had not been noted in the literature prior to *its construction*. This new information allowed us ***to revalidate our original model***[76]. The interview scenario thus enabled mapping of the individual areas of the factors that form the analytical "model" and the influence of these factors on the process of providing public services to various client groups by different line workers.

The interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams in May 2023. The responses were digitally recorded, transcribed into Microsoft Word, and analysed using Atlas.ti Software.

5.2 Analysis of the Obtained Data

The analysis of the information obtained is presented in six subchapters. The first presents information revealing the "political and organisational context" for addressing unemployment among various client groups by line workers at the LOoCR workplaces surveyed (part 5.2.1). Subsequently, attention is paid to the nature of the "problem solved" by line workers for diverse client groups, including their interests and expectations regarding the services provided (part 5.2.2). Next, we examine the "problem-solving process" of unemployed clients as perceived by line workers, using the Four-phase model of client problem-solving presented in the previous chapter (part 5.2.3). In the remaining subchapters, we gradually address how the process and mode of providing services by line workers are influenced by: (i) the "internal capacities of line workers" shaped by their education, work experience, personality dispositions, work motivation and completed training (section 5.2.4), (ii) the "organisational resources" of various kinds available to line

[75] The interview scenario consisted of four thematic blocks, within which information was collected regarding: (i) the working situation of line workers, or rather the "problem" being solved by the workers and the available "organisational resources" to solve it including their influence by organisational policy, (ii) the "capacity of line workers" used to manage the problem including their influence by organisational policy, (iii) the autonomy and "level of discretion" of line workers and "the working methods and procedures" used within them including their influence by organisational policy, and (iv) an assessment of the sufficiency of "the scope of autonomy and discretion" of line workers and "the suitability of the methods and procedures" used by them to solve specific problems of various types of clients.

[76] Specifically, it involved the identification of two new variables - "expectations of support and assistance from citizens" in the Solved Problem area and inadequate "spatial resources" in the Organisational Resources area, and one new sub-area - "organisational resource policy" in the Organisational Policy area (see Figure 4.4, 4.6a, and 4.7a in Chapter 4 for more details).

workers (section 5.2.5), and (iii) the "organisational policy" more or less shaped by various "external and internal actors" and focused on and influencing the recruitment and strengthening of line workers' capacities, the resources available to them and the way they view and solve client problems (section 5.2.6).

5.2.1 Political and Organisational Context of the Problem Solved: The System of Public Employment Services in the Czech Republic, Workplaces Providing Employment Services, and The Goals Pursued by Line Workers when Dealing with Unemployed Clients

Workplaces Providing Public Employment Services in the Czech Republic as Part of the Public Employment Services

In the Czech Republic, services are provided to diverse groups of job seekers through labour offices, which are part of the so-called Public Employment Services (hereinafter, "PES"). This system consists of central management bodies (the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the General Directorate of the LOoCR) and Regional and Local Labour Offices in individual regions and selected municipalities (14 Regional Labour Offices and 292 Local Labour Offices, which serve as contact points). The central bodies are responsible for the creation, transmission, coordination, and control of compliance with various strategic and methodological documents and management acts in the field of employment, as well as for the financial security of the entire system. Regional and local offices are responsible for compliance with and implementation of centrally developed documents and management acts. They are primarily responsible for implementing the resulting public employment services, which should respond as adequately as possible to the current state of the local labour market[77].

Specific services to different groups of job seekers are provided by line workers of these labour offices, who most often come from three different types of workplaces[78]:

[77] Regional LOoCR organisations manage and create methodologies for subordinate contact centres, monitor and evaluate the given regional labour market, register the unemployed, and ensure the payment of benefits and the provision of services financed from the state budget and the European Social Fund Plus. Contact centres implement the agenda for registering the unemployed, providing job-search assistance, and paying benefits.

[78] In addition to these types of workplaces, there are two other types of workplaces with line workers, which focus on the payment of non-insurance social benefits (various departments paying foster care benefits, care allowance, benefits for people with disabilities, etc.) or on employers (workers from the labor market department).

- ***Focused exclusively on the implementation of active or passive state employment policy*** through "advisor-specialists" from the Department of counselling and employment and the so-called "specialists of records and benefits of assistance in material need" from the same department, which are subordinate to the "Employment Department";
- ***Implementing European projects*** through so-called "labour market experts" from the "European Projects Department", which is subordinate to the "Employment and EU Department"; or
- ***Providing specialised professional and psychological counselling*** through "psychologists" and other "specialised counsellors" from the "Counselling and Further Education Department", which is subordinate to the "Employment Department".

Line workers, who are the first to interact with newly arrived job seekers, are employed in the first two types of workplaces. *Workers implementing LMP* usually come from the two aforementioned department types and interact with a wide range of clients. *Workers implementing EU-funded projects* (so-called European projects), on the other hand, form various mutually separate work teams. These participate in the implementation of a specific project that focuses on a selected target group of job seekers characterised by disabilities or disadvantages in the labour market, or a project that serves multiple target groups simultaneously. At the time of the survey, the most common projects focused on young job seekers aged 30 or younger, people aged 50 or older, parents caring for children under 10, and people socially excluded or at risk of social exclusion.

All labour offices have a uniform/standardized organisational structure: (i) *line workers are directly subordinate to their line managers* (head of department), with whom they are in direct and daily contact and (ii) at the same time *they are in indirect/functional contact with senior managers*, (iii) *who are directly subordinate to the director* of the given Regional Labour Office or the director or head of the given contact Local Labour Office.

Act No. 73/2011 Coll established the Labour Office of the Czech Republic. While the qualification requirements and job descriptions of line workers and all other LOoCR workers are set out in Act No. 234/2014 Coll., on the Civil Service, the specific characteristics of these positions are developed based on an agreement between the

relevant actors at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the General Directorate of LOoCR. Directors and heads of departments and divisions of Regional Labour Offices may also incorporate additional characteristics for a given job position.

In our research, we focused on the services provided by line workers in the two types of workplaces mentioned above: workplaces implementing the state active employment policy and *workplaces implementing an EU-funded project targeting young job seekers aged 30 or younger*. In this context, there is a difference between line workers from the two workplaces in the duration of their employment relationship. While regular employees in the first type of workplace typically have permanent employment, workers on European projects are usually hired for the duration of the project. These workers, therefore, feel insecure about their fixed-term contracts. At the same time, project managers feel the need to ensure that these highly experienced workers with expert knowledge retain employment after the project ends by seeking to employ them on a follow-up project.

Goals Pursued by Line Workers when Dealing with Clients

The objectives of line workers when dealing with unemployed clients are clearly defined by Act 435/2004 Coll., on employment. This concerns in particular the provision of information, advisory and intermediary services in the field of job opportunities and the provision of unemployment-related benefits (Section 2, Paragraph 1 h, i and Section 14, Paragraphs 1a-c). Furthermore, the interviews we conducted show that it is possible to identify the following four types of objectives that these workers are trying to achieve:

1) ***"Job-search assistance"*** focused on providing information about employment opportunities in a given labour market, assistance in searching for and obtaining a specific job;
2) ***"Counselling"*** focused on providing information about the benefits and services of the Labour Office of the Czech Republic and other state and non-state organisations, proposing specific procedures for resolving the current life situation;
3) ***"Help"*** focused on providing specific benefits and services offered by the Labour Office of the Czech Republic, which led to strengthening the motivation of clients to search for, obtain, and maintain employment; and

4) ***"Sanctioning"*** focused on removing clients from registration if they violate previously established or agreed-upon rules and procedures.

Line workers often perceive the complexity and difficulty of solving the problems and life situations of many of their clients, which are usually the cause or consequence of their clients' unemployment. In situations where workers recognise that clients are unable to resolve their difficult life situations themselves and, at the same time, actively try to do so, they can pursue other goals, in addition to those mentioned above, that have legislative support. Our findings showed that one of these goals is an activity that can be described as (5) ***"psychosocial individualised support for clients"***. Its essence is the effort of line workers to calm clients, increase their motivation to actively seek, obtain, and maintain employment, and, in doing so, possibly also address their complex life situations. At the same time, line workers can expand their existing activities in the above-mentioned area of "counselling" and "help" beyond their competence. These are situations where workers not only provide clients with information, services and benefits from the labour market, but often try ***to advise to a greater or lesser extent or help to arrange contacts for clients with services from state or non-state organisations that focus on solving other problem areas***, e.g., health, family and housing, addictions, debts, crime, processing applications for temporary protection for foreigners or refugees etc.

The aforementioned goals of line workers, chronologically arranged in one possible real scenario, are summarised, along with examples of the responses we obtained, in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 Goals pursued by line workers when dealing with unemployed clients

GOAL	PROCESS AND REASON FOR ACHIEVING THE GOAL	
JOB-SEARCH ASSISTANCE	Providing information about employment opportunities in a given labour market, and assistance with searching for and obtaining a specific job	• *"Job offer."* (R1A) • *"Help find suitable employment."* (R8A, R13A, R19b) • *"Employ clients."* (R4A, R6A)
PSYCHOSOCIAL INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORT	Reassurance of the client and increased motivation in finding, obtaining, and maintaining employment, or in dealing with the current life situation resulting in unemployment	• *"Support a person, comfort them, calm them down, show them a human face, that we are not stereotypical civil servants."* (R5A) • *"Help as much as possible people who are in a bad life situation and not hurt them."* (R16B)*, "I try to be nice, communicative."* (R18B) *"Try to motivate somehow and activate the unemployed, if they feel they have a handicap, so that they do not fall into long-term unemployment, just help."* (R22B)
COUNSELLING	Providing information about benefits and services from the labour office and other state and non-state organisations, proposing specific procedures to resolve the current life situation of the client	• *"Help them with their journey, employment advice."* (R4A) • *"Advice for those who require it."* (R7A, R22B) • *"Direct people to social support."* (R15B) • *"Help with how to get old-age pension, benefits."* (R17B)
HELP	Provision of specific benefits and services offered by the labour office, which lead to strengthening the motivation of clients to seek, obtain, and maintain employment, or arranging contacts for the services of other state and non-state organisations	• *"According to individual needs, help write a curriculum vitae, prepare for an interview with an employer."* (R13A) • *"Help all clients in many ways who are interested."* (R20B) • *"Direct to other organisations, for example, material needs, shelters, etc."* (R15B)
SANCTIONING	Removing clients from the labour office register if they violate pre-established or agreed-upon rules and procedures	• *"If help is not accepted, then sanction it."* (R16B)

Source: author based on the analysed data

5.2.2 The Problem Solved by Line Workers: Diverse Client Groups, their Interests and Expectations from the Services Provided

To understand the problems line workers face in their daily work when dealing with diverse client groups, it is helpful to understand these clients' characteristics. Specifically, what are the number and types of these clients in terms of their life situations, needs, and problems, what is the level of their motivation to solve their problems, and what are their expectations from the services provided by line workers?

Clients Entering the Labour office and Solving their Problems by Line Workers from Various Workplaces

In both locations we studied, most line workers interact with a relatively large number of diverse clients (approximately 300-600 per worker) across *different life situations*. This applies especially to workers in workplaces focused on implementing state employment policy, who in fact serve as *generalised "gate-keepers"* for all clients entering the labour office. These workers, more or less consciously, "sort" all clients entering the labour office and, using their own capacities or those of other actors in the organisation, try to provide adequate services to each of them. Clients who fall into a specific category of job seekers (usually disabled people, long-term unemployed, applicants under 30 years of age, or people from particular job sectors) are forwarded ("channelled") in some workplaces to a smaller number of line workers who specialise in them. They come from either the same department, workplaces implementing European projects, or workplaces providing specialised professional or psychological counselling. The selection of these specific client groups can also be done the other way around – from specialised workers who request clients from "gatekeepers". A key feature of these workplaces is that *line workers come into contact with a significantly smaller number of specific types of clients with similar problems*, usually several dozen clients per worker, compared to approximately 100-200 clients per worker in workplaces of the first type, and approximately 50-100 clients per worker in workplaces of the second type[79].

Types of Clients Registered at the Labour Office According to the Level of Motivation and Need for Psychosocial Support

The interviews with line workers and their superior managers revealed that jobseeker clients are highly heterogeneous and can be divided into three groups. They differ not only in their diverse life situations but also in the degree of motivation to address job loss and, at the same time, in *the degree of need for psychosocial support and assistance* from line workers. Namely, these are client groups that can be described as those who:

[79] The ESF+ staff interviewed come into contact with a clearly profiled group of clients (graduates), who are small in number (100), are pre-selected by LMP staff, are often difficult to employ or lack motivation to work, and thus require a specific approach.

1) ***"Do not need support and assistance"*** - motivated and readily employable people who can be applied in the labour market without the help of line workers, who are either newly entering the labour market, moving from one job to another, or overcoming a period when their work is not in demand in the labour market;
2) ***"Do not want support and assistance"*** - unmotivated benefit recipients who do not want any services; and
3) ***"Need support and assistance and want it to a greater or lesser extent"*** - people in difficult life situations or with disabilities who cannot find work on their own.

The first group of clients ("Do not need support and assistance") is ***a problem-free group*** for line workers because, given their time-limited life situation associated with short-term or temporary unemployment, they only *"functionally flow through"* the labour office. This group is specifically made up of three separate subgroups: (i) highly employable school graduates who are new entrants to the labour market, (ii) persons transferring from one job to another, and/or (iii) persons performing seasonal employment who, by staying at the labour office, bridge the period when their work is not in demand on the labour market.

The second group of clients ("Do not want support and assistance") is, in the opinion of line workers and their managers, ***the most problematic***. These are people (i) who are not motivated to work because their income from benefits is often at the same level, or even higher than, that of working, and who often work illegally[80]. (ii) These people are unattractive to employers because they are long-term unemployed, and (iii) at the same time, they are often unreliable because after a few days, they do not come to work, or they are incapacitated due to a fake illness. The employer has to pay for their health insurance. In addition, (iv) these are often aggressive people, and removing them from the unemployment register is almost impossible because they often record meetings with workers to initiate criminal proceedings, file various complaints, shout at workers, and threaten them and their families if they do not receive benefits. This group of clients is represented mainly by *people from socially excluded localities*, and to a lesser extent by university-educated people who *have psychological problems, use alcohol or drugs*, *or*

[80] One of the managers interviewed witnessed a debate that was "smiling to the point of tears" when one unemployed person from this group told another that he had arrived by taxi because he would not take the tram, since he was not "welfare trash".

"shady" entrepreneurs who have been making losses for several years, who are registered with the labour office for most of the year and run their business for the remaining one or two months of the year.

The third group of people ("Need support and help and want it to a greater or lesser extent") is represented by *various types of clients who are unable to find work themselves and therefore often* ***require more or less psychosocial support, advice, and assistance*** with benefits, services, and/or finding employment from line workers. These are heterogeneous groups of people who are often difficult to categorise unambiguously, which even the workers themselves do not try to do, except for people with health disabilities who require the care of specialised workers. They differ mainly in the complexity of the problems they encounter, which shapes the challenging life situations they experience, whether temporary or long-term. In addition to (i) disabled people, these include (ii) mothers with young children including single mothers, (iii) difficult-to-employ school graduates, (iv) people of pre-retirement age, (v) people with executions, (vi) returnees from prison, (vii) homeless people and, in recent years also (viii) citizens of Ukraine with temporary protection on the labour market.

Persons classified in this group often ***differ in particular in the following characteristics, experiences, and life situations,*** which we rank according to their possible degree of importance: (i) degree of motivation to work (low/high), (ii) length and duration of work experience (none-never worked/short-term-occasional/short-term-episodic/long-term and permanent), (iii) health status (bad/good), (iv) type of disability (physical/mental/intellectual/combined/none) and time of its onset (from birth/during life), (v) achieved level of education (none or low/medium/high) and attractiveness of the profession (not in demand/in demand), (vi) age (low-graduates and young people/higher – persons in middle age/high – persons in pre-retirement age), (vii) experience with performing socially unacceptable behaviour and the solution to its consequences (without addiction/addiction and their treatment, non-criminal behaviour/criminal behaviour and punishment), (viii) marital status (single/married/divorced), (ix) type of household according to the number of employed persons (no income/single income/multiple income), (x) amount of income and debt (low-income with execution/low-income without execution/middle income/high income), and (xi) care for children, parents, relatives

(carers/non-carers). This group of people is among the key clients of line workers of all types of workplaces, both "gate-keepers", who meet all types of unemployed people, and specialised workers, who meet only specific, selected categories of clients.

Figure 5.3a Types of clients registered within the Labour Office of the Czech Republic and their characteristics

CLIENT TYPES	CHARACTERISTICS	
"DO NOT NEED SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE"	Motivated employable people who are applicable in the labour market and who are entering the labour market ● from the education system (graduates), ● moving from job to job, or ● overcoming a period when their work is not in demand on the labour market	• *"They make up a third of all job seekers who came to work, they are employable on the market, in demand by employers, they can sell themselves, they want to work." (R9A, manager), "They have worked their whole lives, they may be at the office for the first, second, third time, but they will only stay there for a short time and then they will find something."* (R17B) • *"These applicants move from job to job and often require only temporary benefits"* (R3A)*, "retraining."* (R2A) • *"They often do not need help at all because they have a field that is well-applicable on the labour market"* (R6A)*, "They are able to find a job that meets their requirements on their own, they need to be given space to look around and find the "real nut"* (R16B)*, "They often have a clear plan, interest in a specific job or they already have a job when they come to the labour office or they already have an employment contract or they have it negotiated."* (R20B) • *"There are also applicants who have seasonal jobs, pay taxes, and are entitled to benefits. They are not looking for work, they only want to cover the period when they are not working, because they know that they will resume their business again in the spring, for example, in March."* (R18B)

Source: author based on the analysed data

Figure 5.3b Types of clients registered within the Labour Office of the Czech Republic and their characteristics (continuation)

CLIENT TYPES	CHARACTERISTICS	
"DO NOT WANT SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE"	Unmotivated benefit recipients who do not want any services	• *"This group wants nothing but benefits. Applicants play the game of applying for a job because otherwise they would not be entitled to benefits."* (R9A MNG) • *"These are unmotivated applicants from the socially excluded localities. They often devise strategies to stay registered with the labour office. For example, when a woman has a child, she has it transferred to her mother so that she stays registered and continues to receive benefits, they receive foster care benefits, etc."* (R2A), *"…their motivation is to participate as much as possible in an EU-funded project because they receive larger benefits"* (R13A/ZPM) • *"These are permanent clients, clients who have been with the office for a long time, who are not active."* (R17B) • *"Young applicants often do not have a role model in the family, at the age of fifteen they come with their parents for material need benefits."* (R16B), *"They live in an environment where the parents are unemployed themselves and there is no pressure or demand on the child to get up regularly, go to work, etc."* (R3A)
"NEED SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE AND WANT IT TO A GREATER OR LESSER EXTENT"	Diverse groups of people in difficult life situations or with disabilities who cannot find work on their own	• *"These are different types of clients who differ in the level of difficulty of their life situation and the feasibility of their requirements. These include people who have worked or never worked, people with or without health restrictions, and people in specific life situations."* (R1A), *"They are often mothers with children, including single mothers, to whom employers do not offer part-time work, people with disabilities, half of whom are people with a psychiatric diagnosis, or people with insufficient or inadequate education. These also include university-educated people with a specific focus, such as biologists, chemists, or physicists, who are not employable."* (R2A) • *"Clients who need help finding a suitable path."* (R3), *Many of them "...want to work, but do not know how to create the right CV, which influences the employer's selection."* (R2A) • *"Some clients will ask for help and others do not want or are unable to communicate and need to develop communication skills."* (R6A), *"They need a push, they have been in many tenders, but they have failed, and sometimes it is enough to talk to them, outline their situation, and possible solutions."* (R9A MNG)

Source: author based on the analysed data

5.2.3 Problem-solving Process: the Working Procedures of Line Workers Using their Capacities, Motivations, and Available Organisational Resources when Dealing with Clients

As noted in the methodological section of this chapter (subchapter 5.1), we used our four-phase model of the problem-solving process to analyse service provision by line workers. In this context, we further present our findings obtained for the individual phases of this process.

Phase 1: Problem Mapping and Evaluation of Unemployed Clients

The essence of this phase is the line worker's initial data collection and subsequent analysis of client information to understand their life situation, problems, and needs.

In the *problem mapping phase*, the interviewed line workers usually try to obtain information related to (i) the client's life situation to create his "personal history", (ii) education and work experience to create his "work history", (iii) the types of problems and their severity that often prevent him from getting a job especially in the areas of health, family, income and possible foreclosures, housing, etc., (iv) the motivation to seek employment and possibly also the client's specific work expectations. In addition, several interviewed workers explicitly stated that (v) they usually do not record any personal "intimate", "sensitive" information about the client (see Figure 5.4 for more details).

The source of this information is usually (i) an entry form filled out by the client called "Job Application form" including an entry questionnaire, (ii) individual initial and in case of need subsequent interviews between the worker and the client, and (iii) in case of need external sources, most often from employers, social service providers, or from the client's medical documentation etc.

Figure 5.4 The process of mapping the problems of unemployed clients by line workers

Information gathering	On creating a personal and work history: • *"During the initial interview, we will take a history, whether work or personal, we will analyse the work situation, the background that is important for the performance of the job"* (R17B), *"…I find out the client's life situation, if he is looking for a job, what health and life problems he has, if he is looking for housing. I try to get to know him."* (R2a), *"…we address his life situation: housing, children." (R15B), "…how he lives, what experiences he has, how he affects the employer, what form of employment he is looking for."* (R22B) • *"A client comes to us. We either register them or they come registered. We verify all data and contact them to confirm their availability if you need to engage them during the registration process, and so on. This is the first phase. You review documents related to education and past employment relationships to calculate support. Then another visit is written in the contact sheet, the client is instructed again, you ask if they understood, if they want to ask anything, then there is room for their own activity."* (R20B)
	On motivation to find a job • *"Clients should be motivated, they should try to find a job" (R1A), "…I try to help them as much as possible, approach them informally."* (R2A), *"I try to motivate even unmotivated clients as much as possible, the solution is not to exclude clients"* (R4A), *"…they need to be repeatedly activated, supported, offered jobs because they are not trying."* (R3A) • *"Those who do not want to work cannot be forced to work in any way. Some of them even admit that they are registered at the office only for insurance…"* (R6A), *"…some do not go to meetings, do not answer the phone when they come to the office, get lost on the mezzanine and do not arrive."* (R14A) Intimate information about clients: • *"Sensitive information"* (R3a), or *"I do not enter some personal and intimate information into the OK work system. It strengthens trust, relationships, and subsequent work."* (R18b)
Information sources	• *"At the beginning, applicants fill out applications, where they tell us what information they need to know, and then we ask them questions in an interview."* (R19B) • *"To obtain key information, I use an application for job-search assistance, an interview, and an initial questionnaire about the client. I also find out what prevents them from getting a job, for example, if they have any executions or insufficient education"* (R4A)

Source: author based on the analysed data

The assessment of a specific client's problem is related to the client category into which the line worker, based on the data obtained and his/her experience with different types of clients, has classified him/her, i.e. whether he/she is in the group that does not need support and assistant, needs and wants it, or needs it but is not interested in it (see Figure 5.3). This assessment informs the subsequent phase of work with the client, which involves setting tasks and selecting procedures to achieve them.

This *categorisation of clients* usually relies on information from the entry job application form and questionnaire, as well as communication with the client and their verbal and non-verbal expressions. Specifically, based on expressions of (i)

motivation/demotivation, or (ii) pleasant/aggressive behaviour in the form of annoyance or "barking" in the first case, or (iii) from the form and completion of the job application form for job-search assistance, or (iv) the dress code in the second case.

In this context, the workers we interviewed reported that they do not pre-screen clients based on selected general characteristics, as this is not often feasible. For this reason, they evaluate clients primarily through a personal interview[81]. At the same time, they claimed that they *try to approach all clients individually, without prejudice or predetermined stereotypes, and without favouring some clients and discriminating against others*. In this context, some workers explicitly stated that they try to communicate simply with clients with low education or with mental disabilities, without using professional terms.

On the other hand, *some workers stated that they perceived a greater need to assist certain types of clients based on their past and current experiences during the interview, depending on how clients affected them and how they communicated* with them. For example, some workers perceived a need to help more people at pre-retirement age, as well as those who have worked their entire lives and are struggling to find employment.

When dealing with less employable clients and those who are not motivated to work, they realise that working with them will be more challenging. Motivating the unemployed is extremely important because *unmotivated clients can be a source of prejudice for workers.* Furthermore, *declining client motivation often reduces line workers' motivation to work with them*[82] (see Figure 5.5 for more details).

[81] The process of problem assessment specifically consists of the fact that during the individual conversation between the worker and the client, when new information about the client's problem is obtained, the worker uses a more or less individualised approach to the client. The degree of this approach is influenced by how the worker has evaluated the information obtained about the client so far, or in which category the client has been classified in terms of whether he/she needs and wants or does not want help, or whether he/she does not need help, or to what extent.

[82] *"To deal with job seekers, two-way activity and motivation are necessary, as research shows that with increasing unemployment, client motivation decreases, and if this motivation decreases and is not reinforced by the worker, it also makes the work and motivation of the worker himself more difficult"* (R4A).

Figure 5.5 The process of assessing the problems of unemployed clients by line workers

Evaluation of the information obtained and the categorisation of clients based on this information	• *"I do not differentiate clients in advance, because it is not possible to estimate this based on the general characteristics of the client, but only based on an individual interview."* (R4A) • *"I try to approach clients individually. Some need more care and some are more independent and need support."* (R5A) • *"I do not have any stereotypes of clients, but there are indications at first glance that someone will be harder to work with, that they are problematic. Warning signs can be detected in verbal expression and in how the client behaves: they are annoyed, barking, demotivated, and often have not worked their entire lives. Alternatively, even from non-verbal expressions, how they are dressed, in what condition the application is brought."* (R5A) • *"I have no problem dealing with any type of client, even if it is homeless." (R6A)* • *"I am not an official, but a person who wants to help them /clients/ and thus gain their sympathy and all the information and attitudes. That is why I speak informally, I try to be helpful, I know everything about them, I know their lives, they open up to me more, they tell me more."* (R2A) • *"We adjust the style of dealing with clients. When an applicant with a basic education comes, we explain it simply. We tell them specifically what they have to do. We communicate with them in a way they understand. We do not insert professional names into the conversation and the like."* (R15B) • *"I try to pay attention to everyone equally, but motivated ones evoke a more positive attitude. When I see that clients are interested, I try to invest that time and energy in them. Clients who are not interested, however, often make fun of us, creating prejudices in us against these clients."* (R14A)

Source: author based on the analysed data

Phase 2: Determining Tasks and Choosing Procedures and Tools to Achieve Them

The purpose of this phase of the service provision process is to determine the goals that can be achieved for a given client and the specific services that will achieve them.

Our findings show *that line workers use information from the previous phase of the intervention, including individual agreements with clients to set goals and procedures for achieving them.* Clients should consider whether they want and can achieve the goals and procedures under consideration.

This process most often occurs during an *initial, so-called "counselling" interview*, during which the line worker (i) first informs the client of his "rights and obligations", (ii) subsequently carries out a "diagnostic" of his life situation, needs and problems which represents mapping of the problem, (iii) together they consider the client's "possibilities (capacity) to obtain employment", (iv) ascertains the client's "opinions on unemployment" which is essentially a measure of motivation level and, if necessary, informs himself about the job that the client has already selected, (v) based on the evaluation of this information, provides the client with information about the services offered that should help solve his

situation ("so-called Information Offers"), and (vi) finally, more or less together they plan the tasks that should be achieved and the procedures (tools) for achieving them, if the client does not already have a pre-selected job he wants to apply for.

At the same time, *dates for further meetings are scheduled*, at which the line worker evaluates the extent to which the client has fulfilled the jointly planned tasks and used the proposed or jointly agreed procedures.

The subject of the debates on the offered services is *the choice of specific tools* that would enable the client to solve their life situation, needs, and problems, except for those who have selected a particular job position in advance. Usually, this involves providing information (i) on the possibility of drawing contributions and benefits and then (ii) considering the use of individual active employment policy tools offered separately or when clients participate in one of the European projects offered by the office. These tools usually include selection of a suitable job and individual counselling based on balance-, work-, and ergo-diagnostics, Individual Action Plan (IAP), motivational programmes and/or specialised retraining courses, job-search assistance, and/or services offered within Job Clubs at Labour Offices that most often focus on possible ways of searching for jobs, working with the internet, writing CVs and preparing for personal interviews with employers.

Figure 5.6a Processes related to setting tasks and choosing specific procedures and tools to achieve them by line workers

Communicating client rights and obligations	• *"I will educate him about the rights and obligations"* (R17B), *"…which the applicants have. There is a lot, so we try to repeat things…"* (R18B)
Providing information about services offered	• *"At the initial meeting, I give the client information material from the office about the services offered, which he could join, and I give him space to answer questions."* (R17B)
Planning goals to be achieved and procedures for achieving them (tools)	• *"I will write some notes for him, what would be appropriate, for example, to give references often, after the initial meeting, I will estimate how to work with the client."* (R17B) • *"When I have collected information, we choose procedures together with the client. I know what the options are, and the client knows what his preferences and needs are."* (R18B) • *"If someone has a job lined up or a promise, they report it in advance. They are always given the space to find a job in line with their own ideas during the first two months… If they do not have a job lined up, they post job openings in their field. You post job openings according to the requirements, and they then call for the positions."* (R20B)

Source: author based on the analysed data

Figure 5.6b Processes related to setting tasks and choosing specific procedures and tools to achieve them by line workers (continued)

Types of instruments considered and subsequently provided	Information about contributions and benefits: • *"We provide clients with information, for example, about the possibility of obtaining social security contributions, for example, for housing, about the possibility of contacting other specialised workers who will provide more detailed information about benefits, and offer forms."* (R1A) Offering jobs, issuing letters of recommendation: • *"During the meeting, I offer specific job offers, or I can issue them a letter of recommendation, when they go directly to the employer and are obliged to discuss the position with him."* (R17B) Active employment policy tools: • *"We use socially useful jobs, which I think are excellent, or community service. They are ideal for those who have been here for a long time. We also use various projects and advisory programs. We have some projects as a labour office. Furthermore, others are offered by private organisations. Some are better, and some are worse. I would say that ours are not bad at all. Moreover, they can handle subsidies, which employers really listen to, or we approve retraining, which is also great."* (R18B) • *"We also offer projects from the European Social Funds, for example, where there are programs, or we have our own advisory programs, job clubs, or advice, specifically how to write a CV, a motivation letter, how to behave at an interview... Or we also conclude IAP, where there are activities that should motivate applicants."* (R17B) • *"I often offer the possibility of retraining. It is preferable to obtain the employer's commitment in advance. Completing the retraining itself… will not secure you the job. Employers primarily ask for experience in the field. I also try to motivate them and offer projects, whether internal or external, under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. They help many people."* (R16B)

Source: author based on the analysed data

Phase 3: Providing Tools and Monitoring Their Use

The interviews showed that line workers have substantial autonomy and discretion in determining the types and methods of services provided. They can provide tools that fully meet the needs and problems of individual clients. In this context, they have the opportunity to defend their decision to their superiors and colleagues, whether or not they chose a given procedure.

At the same time, line workers can use *measures when dealing with clients that allow them to be punished* by removing the clients from the register of the Labour Office of the Czech Republic if the clients do not use these measures or comply with them. Most often, this involves either using a recommendation letter for a job with a specific employer or an Individual Action Plan, which is mandatory for workers to write with clients after five months of registration with the labour office if they are not successful in finding a job. Line workers use these tools especially with clients who are "lax", "do not cooperate for a long

time", are often repeatedly registered, and are not motivated to look for and find a job, since their main motive is to receive benefits.

On the other hand, the policies of both departments, as reflected in senior managers' strategies, support the view that line workers provide all tools (including IAP) tailored to individual clients and use sanctions only exceptionally. This is also evidenced by the increased use of services from specialised advisors in other LOoCR departments by clients who have been registered with the labour office for more than one year.

The use of the tools by clients and the fulfilment of the agreed tasks are determined and evaluated by line workers in subsequent individual meetings with the clients. Based on the results, they jointly decide on the following work process if the client does not find a job by then.

Figure 5.7a Processes related to the provision of tools/services and monitoring their use by line workers

Providing tools/services	The possibility of providing tools/services that meet the needs and problems of the client: • *"We can adapt the working procedures to the specific client. When something new is introduced, we can ask questions and articulate our views. From a legal standpoint, I must comply with certain requirements, even if I do not like them. However, for example, in the case of pre-selection for a job position, I can justify why I do not give him a recommendation, for example, if he already has a job lined up, or I think he is not suitable for it."* (R15B) • *"If the client wants more care, he will get it. If he does not want it, he will not have it."* (R6A)
	Possibility of using tools/services that allow for sanctioned client exclusion (recommendations, IAP after six months of registration, calls with advisors after a year of registration): • *"If a client is lax or has been here for a long time, we give them recommendations, we send them to specific employers. Then they cannot refuse." (R18B) "If he refuses, these are people who are often registered repeatedly, we will exclude him. He consistently waits until the day after six months to register again, without wanting to deal with his unemployment in any way. This person has no business here; he is not the appropriate candidate. After five months on the register, we are legally obliged to conclude an individual action plan and set some tasks for him. It is a tool for assistance. However, if he does nothing further, we can exclude him for failing to meet the conditions. It will kick someone out... And then there is the end of the year, when the counselling staff helps us with unsuccessful clients... They have much more time for them. They are looking for information about why he is registered, what the candidate would like help with."* (R16B) • *"An individual action plan may seem like a formality, but we are encouraged to tailor it, so we try to do it that way. We are pushed to tailor it to the client's specific situation so that it makes sense."* (R17B)

Source: author based on the analysed data

Figure 5.7b Processes related to the provision of tools/services and monitoring their use by line workers (continued)

Monitoring the use of the tools provided to clients	• *"We give them dates. Then they come, and we try to find out what is new, whether they have been looking for a job, where they have sent their CVs, and how they are doing. We often hear that employers do not hear from them much." (R18B)* • *"The subsequent meetings build on the first one. The client leaves each meeting with a task. For example, to ensure that their criminal record is cleared. At the subsequent meetings, we evaluate the results and determine the date and content of the next meeting." (R15B)*

Source: author based on the analysed data

Phase 4: Evaluation of the Suitability and Impact of Procedures and Tools on the Solved Problem of Unemployed Clients and Possible Choice of Further Procedure

The essence of this phase is to review the selected procedures and the effects of the provided tools and measures on addressing the client's life situation, problems, and needs, and, if necessary, to select an alternative procedure if the client remains unemployed. This *check is usually carried out by a line worker and his/her superiors (line manager, or senior manager) or by an external entity* responsible for the implementation of labour market policy (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, General Directorate of LOoCR) or for the effective use of funds (Ministry of Finance).

The interviews conducted indicate that the Labour Office of the Czech Republic records statistics only for clients who have successfully found employment or have been dismissed due to sanctions. *The assessment of the impact of individual work procedures or tools on the resolution of clients' life situations is not routinely monitored and is often difficult to substantiate*. The main reasons are the complexity of clients' problems and the lack of knowledge about the impact of other external factors on finding or not finding a job, e.g., factors affecting the failure to find a job for seasonal workers, factors affecting the failure to find a job for unmotivated clients among benefit recipients, etc.

Figure 5.8 Possibilities for evaluating the suitability and impact of procedures and tools used by unemployed clients to solve their problems

Knowledge only about clients who find work, and let the line worker know	• *"The best thing is when clients find work. Then we know that we have helped them... This is regularly checked by management and statistics, as well as the situation when a client is disqualified."* (R21B)
Reasons for the difficulty of clearly assessing the impact of the tools on the client's problem being solved	• *"It is difficult to judge the impact of individual tools. The approach is usually complex. It includes several activities."* (R16B) • *"We do not keep statistics on success. We do not know how clients are doing after we are no longer in contact with them."* (R17B) • *"If someone has seasonal work and just reports to us, the impact of our efforts cannot be fully determined, and maybe it is not there at all. Or if people do not want to work."* (R20B)

Source: author based on the analysed data

5.2.4 Internal Capacities of Line Workers: Education, Work Experience, Personality, Work Motivation, and Completed Training

The way public services are provided by line workers and the success in solving their clients' problems are undoubtedly significantly influenced by the internal capacities of individual workers. These include their education, work experience, personal disposition, work motivation, and completed training.

Level and Type of Education and Length of Work Experience

Looking at the level and type of education achieved by the public employment service workers we surveyed, it follows that *the vast majority of line workers from workplaces implementing LMP in both locations have secondary education with a high school diploma (75%) in various fields of study* (most often economics, general grammar school, or pedagogy). A smaller number of workers have higher vocational school or university education (the remaining 25%), also in various fields (education, social work, theory of history and literature, tourism), with these workers predominating in location B. Only three workers graduated from the field of social work, which can be expected to predominate. In contrast, *workers in workplaces implementing the European project for young job seekers mostly have university education (90%), across various fields* (political science, social pedagogy, social administration, public economics). The exception is the position of project administrator in both locations, who have a secondary education. The reason is obviously the demanding nature of the job of workers implementing LMP, which "just anyone" is not willing to do, and at the same time, the selectivity of the recruitment of workers implementing European projects by their managers, which corresponds to the requirements of the Civil Service Act for filling this type of job position.

While a high proportion of workers implementing LMP have only been working at the labour office for a few years (2 to 5 years) in location A, there is a large number of workers at the office for around twenty years in location B. The reason is the higher number of clients per worker and the replacement of long-term workers who *voluntarily left the labour office due to the heavy workload during the COVID-19 pandemic* in the first location. This fact was also reflected in higher work motivation among short-term workers, compared with a greater tendency toward work negativity and burnout among workers

with longer work histories. Most workers from workplaces implementing a European project for young job seekers also stayed at the labour office for a shorter period of time (3 to 6 years), because their stay is usually limited by the duration of the project, except for managers, who hold leadership positions in various consecutive projects and thus work at the office for several years.

Personality Disposition and Work Motivation

The opinions of line workers and their managers clearly indicated that the prerequisite for providing quality services to individual clients is not the level or type of education. All workers unanimously stated that a secondary education, such as a high school diploma, is sufficient for performing this type of work. The key factors can be considered to be (i) *the personal disposition of the worker motivated by the desire to help others* based on empathy, helpfulness, ability to instil trust, communicate, respond to specific needs, propose appropriate solutions to problems and at the same time (ii) his/her *practical experience in dealing with different groups of clients and possible ways to help them*.[83] The statements also showed that the necessary prerequisite for quality performance of line workers can be considered in particular (iii) their *internal motivation to perform this type of work* based on the fact that they see meaning in it and enjoy their work[84] and (iv) *its strengthening through support from colleagues, praise, kind words and financial rewards from superiors, and occasionally thanks from some clients.*[85]

Completed Training: Civil Service Exams and Educational and Training Programs

For newly hired line workers of both types of workplaces, it can be expected that, in addition to the education they have achieved, their work activities are significantly influenced by (i) *initial* tra*ining*, usually provided by a human resources officer of the given

[83] *"A specific type of education is not necessary a high school diploma and patience are enough. The requirements are social empathy, learning the laws, and knowing who to contact."* (R3A), *"It's about experience in communicating with people, being able to think about all the things that need to be addressed to successfully manage flawless administration"* (R13A)*, and "...the ability to respond and successfully solve client problems"* (R14A).

[84] *"If I didn't enjoy it and didn't want to work here, the poor manager wouldn't be able to do much about it. I'm motivated"* (R17B).

[85] *"We have great management. We can come up with anything. We have a good atmosphere here." (R15), "We have a helpful and listening manager"* (R22B), *"I am motivated especially when a client personally thanks me or writes me an email"* (R16B).

labour office, (ii) *training by a mentor* from among more experienced colleagues from the same workplace, and (iii) *successful passing of the civil service exam* provided by the General Directorate of the Employment and Labor Relations Office and implemented in one of the three regional labour offices of the Czech Republic. In the first case, *initial training* takes place within three to six months of joining the labour office. It covers the Civil Service Act, the Employment Act, and employees' rights and obligations related to normal operations. In the second case, newly hired workers are assigned a mentor during the first weeks after their entry into the labour office. He teaches the workers specific procedures for working with different types of clients in various situations and with the related administration[86] (according to one of the managers, this is the so-called "school of life in the workplace", R10A MNG). In the third case, all newly hired employees in both types of workplaces are required by the Civil Service Act to complete a civil service exam in Employment Services, which covers the Employment Act and the Administrative Code, within 1 year of joining the labour office. The interviewed employees assessed the civil service exam as comprehensive and very demanding.

Line workers also have the opportunity to complete various *educational and training programs*. In both monitored locations, line workers are provided with mainly three categories of courses: (i) *legislative courses*, most often conducted online (in particular, the Employment Act, the Administrative Code, the Labor Code, subsistence allowance and various currently amended legal norms), (ii) *communication courses* focused on strengthening soft-skills *and case-based seminars* focused on solving situations and problems of various types of clients, conducted face-to-face (job-search assistance and negotiations with job seekers, negotiations with problem clients, assertive behaviour, burnout syndrome, case-based seminars, presentation skills, IAP) and (iii) *courses focused on managing administrative activities* (working on a PC with a information system for recording work with clients named "OK-work", with data boxes, with Word and Excel software). In addition, the interviewed workers from workplaces implementing a European project for young job seekers participated in (iv) seminars about the project in which they work and (v) *seminars about other European projects* offered to clients at the given office.

[86] *"Every new employee here gets their own mentor, an experienced employee, and they train them. They show them how to work with the program. We show them how to work with a client."* (R25B MNG). In location A, this training takes place at a so-called "training desk" with fewer clients (R5A).

The three types of courses listed above were offered in limited capacity at the time of the survey (May 2023). In particular, courses of the second type, which focused on communication and case-study seminars and are usually in high demand, were offered only to a limited extent. The places offered across the entire Czech Republic were filled very quickly, in a non-transparent, chaotic, and inefficient manner.[87] *Online courses of the first and third types predominated*. At the same time, although the course offerings were unsystematic and workers often did not know about them, participation in them was voluntary at location A. In contrast, in location B, *an obligation to complete at least two courses per year was regularly introduced*. The vast majority of workers surveyed from both locations criticised, in particular, the limited opportunity to complete second-type courses, which involve face-to-face work ("communication skills"), and the predominance of training delivered online via *e-learning*. *Online courses, in particular, have been criticised for their limited benefits and impersonality, and possibly for completion problems if the training program "froze"* due to technical issues.[88]

The interviews also showed that, in location A, with one large workplace, workers particularly highlighted the knowledge benefits of different types of courses, depending on their inclination toward *administrative activities ("legislative courses") or individual work with clients ("communication courses" and "case study seminars").* Given their frequent encounters with problematic and disadvantaged clients, these workers preferred courses focused on individual client work, problem-solving, assertiveness training, and burnout.

In location B, with more decentralised workplaces, workers also highlighted the benefits of communication courses in particular. They also *positively assessed "courses focused on problem clients", whom they often encounter*[89]*, as well as "case study seminars",* in which they had the opportunity to simulate reactions to various model situations of dealing with clients and to share their experiences. Most of these workers

[87] *"The 'first-come, first-served' method is used. Often, by the time I could report the specific names of the employees to the colleague in charge of filling the positions, the positions had already been filled. Sometimes, I didn't even have time to inform the employees about the positions offered, and they had already been filled."* (R24B MNG)

[88] *"E-learning is a disaster, it doesn't help you, the technology often breaks down, it's stressful, then it's not enough to finish the test part on time."* (R24B MNG)

[89] *"Almost every second client is verbally aggressive. The girls are exhausted and unable to handle the daily onslaught of these people. The training shows them how to calm themselves down, how they can react."* (R24B MNG)

considered the possibility of personal meetings with workers from the Czech Labour Office workplaces from other regions to be a significant benefit of the offered educational and training programmes.[90]

5.2.5 Organisational Resources Available to Line Workers to Solve Problems: Staff, Space for Negotiation, Time, Legislation and Powers, Technology and Information, Communication, Financial Evaluation

Human Resources: Type of Line Workers and Ratio of Clients per Worker

As already mentioned, public employment services at the line level are primarily provided by workers from workplaces that implement state employment policy (so-called "advisors-specialists") and from workplaces that implement European projects (so-called "labour market experts") in the Czech Republic. Secondarily, from workplaces providing specialised professional and psychological counselling, "psychologists" and other "specialised advisors" focused on selected groups of job seekers, on types of counselling and further education. In our research, we concentrate on workers from the first two types of workplaces.

Looking at the proportion of clients per worker across the workplaces we examined in both locations, it follows that the number of workers in workplaces implementing LMP is significantly smaller than that of *ESF+ workers, who are in contact with a much lower number of clients*. While the average number of clients per worker in an LMP workplace was approximately 500 (400-600) in location A and approximately 300 (250-380) in location B, the number of clients in workplaces implementing a European project was approximately 30 in both locations.

Furthermore, *human resources in the Czech Republic have been significantly shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years*, as a significant proportion of line workers left the labour offices due to the "negative energy" prevailing there, and the original line staff was replaced by new staff requiring training.

Time Resources: The Amount of Time Dedicated to Clients and Administration

[90] *"It's always such a distraction"* (R16), *"The case study seminars are really nice, where we meet colleagues from other branches, it's very beneficial"* (R18), *so there is "sharing of experience from other workers, with other colleagues."* (R22B)

The number of clients logically affected the time available to workers in both locations, particularly across both workplace types. While workers in workplaces implementing LMP with a large number of clients had an average of 15 minutes per client, those in the second type of workplace had sufficient time to negotiate with individual clients due to their lower client counts. Despite the high number of clients that workers implementing LMP had to serve, the vast majority stated that this work "can be managed somehow" and that it was a "sustainable number" of clients. The solution for them was usually to adopt a strategy of selecting clients, focusing on those to whom they devote more time because they need help and show interest, and then on those clients to whom they devote less time because they themselves do not show interest in help. The feasibility of this strategy rests on *workers' autonomy in deciding which clients to invite to meetings more or less often*. On the other hand, most of these workers also state that *the large number of clients and the lack of time for individual work with them "makes it impossible to prepare for clients in advance, consider their specific life situations and think through possible solutions"* (R4A) *and "to devote more time to them during the interview and discuss everything in more depth"* (R11B MNG).

In addition to the large number of clients, the time required to solve their problems individually is significantly constrained by administrative work, to which most of the surveyed line workers are required *to devote at least half of their working time*. There is a large amount of it and it mainly concerns (i) manually entering information into client files and simultaneously recording identical information into the "OK-work" information system, (ii) processing a large number of forms often due to GDPR, (iii) writing emails, (iv) sending messages to state authorities and (v) employers, whether the applicant has registered with them, or has started working, etc.

Spatial Resources: Number of Employees in The Office

In both locations studied, *more workers were present in one office*. This significantly hinders the implementation of private, anonymous interventions between workers and clients who often need to address specific problems and are in difficult life situations. Therefore, they do not want to discuss in front of more than one worker or client. In addition, *some clients do not come alone but bring several other family members, which often causes noise in the*

office and a feeling of crampiness. A greater problem is faced mainly by workers from workplaces implementing LMP compared to workplaces implementing European projects, where five to six workers work in one office, compared to two workers from workplaces implementing EU projects in location A and two workers in location B, compared to offices with one worker from workplaces implementing EU projects.

In addition, at location B, the problem is that the line workers implementing the EU project, who first contact clients, are not in the same building as the specialist workers. This often causes clients with cognitive impairments or disabilities to be unable to find and visit these workers.

Legislative Sources: Type and Nature of Rules, Scope of Powers

Line workers in both types of workplaces (i.e., implementing LMP and European projects) rely on numerous legal documents, primarily laws, methodologies, and guidelines, in their work. These define and regulate (i) their powers (the "Administrative Code"), (ii) behaviour with clients (the "Code of ethics"), (iii) work procedures (the "Methodology of the Advisory Process"), (iv) services provided to individual clients in the form of specific tools and measures (the "Employment Act") and (v) the rights and obligations of the clients themselves (the "Labor Code"). In addition to the Employment Act, the Administrative Code and the Labor Code, which represent the institutional framework of the activities of line workers, the alpha and omega of their work is primarily the Methodology of the Advisory Process, which many workers consider to be a "cookbook", a "written procedure for working with a client", which is passed on among colleagues at a given workplace. The large number of these rules – especially directives, methodologies, and amended laws (see Figure 5.9 for more details) – thus places high demands on line workers' knowledge.

Figure 5.9 Key legal documents/rules (laws, methodologies, guidelines) used by line workers of Public Employment Services in the Czech Republic

KEY LEGAL DOCUMENTS USED BY LINE WORKERS OF PES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

- Act No. 435/*2004* Coll., on Employment
- Act No. 262/*2006* Coll., Labour Code
- Act No. 500/*2004* Coll., Administrative Procedures
- Methodology of the Advisory Process Implemented with Job Applicants at the Labour Office of the Czech Republic (MoLSA ref. no. 2013/80685-141)
- Service Regulation of the General Directorate No. 6/2017 - Rules of Ethics for Civil Servants
- Directive of the General Directorate No. 2/2016 as *amended* by Appendix No. 1 - Rules of Cooperation between Employment Departments and NSD (Material Need) Departments of the Labour Office of the Czech Republic
- DG Directive No. 3/2020 - Supplementing data to the OK-Work information system in the Unemployment Registration and Support module
- DG *Directive* 8/2018 - Ensuring the protection of *personal* data
- DG Communication 28/2019 - Procedure for marking documents by civil servants and employees in the employment relationship of the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Czech Republic
- Communication of the Director of the Office of the Prosecutor General and the Project Office Department No. 1/*2021* - Specification of the procedures of the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Czech Republic in the implementation of AEP tools and measures
- Organisational regulations
- Documentation regulations

Source: author based on the analysed data

In addition to *the laws and numerous guidelines issued by the General Directorate of LOoCR, which primarily regulate administrative activities (such as unemployment benefits records, individual counselling procedures, and the preparation of a Client Development Plan), the work of line workers is also significantly influenced by numerous* internal methodologies. These are created by methodologists at individual regional offices and govern virtually all processes and activities conducted at the labour office. According to the workers interviewed, these are "methodologies for everything", which mainly concern (i) new employees, (ii) benefits, (iii) administrative procedures, (iv) action plans drawn up with clients, (v) File Order determining what can and cannot be in the client's file, etc.

Line workers must adhere to these methodologies to ensure that information is complete and that nothing is missing during an external audit. *Their compliance should also be regularly checked* by an internal methodologist and used by the superior line manager to evaluate the line worker's work. This mainly applies to the File Order. This may not be the case with other methodologies. A typical example is the advisory process, which is usually just a "methodology on paper," since workers in both surveyed locations and both types of workplaces "learn as you go" from more experienced colleagues. Its reading depends on the worker's discretion. This fact was noted by the vast majority of workers

interviewed, who stated that procedures for working with clients vary *across workplaces* ("everyone does it differently") and, according to some respondents, should therefore be standardised.

The methodologies developed by the General Directorate of the LOoCR were also criticised for being often detached from practice. Many line workers also argued that *some laws were too abstract, formulated in general terms, and that some were too strict* and should therefore be relaxed. A typical example is job seekers who are registered for the first time; they should be removed from the register if they provide the wrong date and do not attend the agreed meeting with the labour office employee.

The scope of powers of line workers of the Czech Labour Office, which defines the exercise of their powers and the tools for fulfilling their tasks, is determined by the nature of the above-mentioned legal documents. They define the positions held by workers and the associated work content related to service provision, encompassing both administrative activities and direct client interventions.

Despite the large number of rules and the necessity of strictly adhering to legislative standards ("The train does not go through that", R11A), all workers unanimously claim that they have sufficient, if not extensive, room for manoeuvre to decide which specific services to provide to clients and in what order. On the other hand, most of them often face two types of problems.

The first problem is *"difficult application/enforcement of some well-formulated rules".* These usually concern limited opportunities to re-engage inactive and unmotivated clients by phone, email, or text messages, and their removal from the register of job seekers. Uncooperative clients often intentionally provide an incorrect delivery address, to which the post office repeatedly sends letters notifying them of their removal from the register, or they do not provide an address at all. Moreover, the removal process is complex when clients attend pre-arranged meetings with labour office staff. If removal occurs, clients may re-register with the labour office six months after the removal. This situation discourages line workers from removing these clients because the process is time-consuming and administratively demanding.

The second problem that line workers face is their *"limited powers and time needed to resolve clients' problems with complex or specific issues",* which require cooperation with other specialised state and/or non-state organisations. Typically, this involves resolving problems that do not fall within the competence of labour office workers, but that directly affect clients' chances of obtaining employment, particularly in areas such as health, addictions, indebtedness, and housing. In this context, some of the line workers interviewed assist these clients only by mediating contact with relevant organisations and experts (e.g., doctors, social workers).[91]

Technological and Information Resources: Availability and Quality of Computers and Software, Printers, Degree of Digitalisation of Administration

The interviews showed that the existing *technical equipment* used by line workers to work with clients, in the form of PCs and printers, is, in some cases, outdated (especially in location A for LMP workers). However, it *is still functional and is rated by workers as "satisfactory" or "sufficient".* This is even though the internet is often "slow", sometimes "interrupts", and workers have limited access to some websites. It is not known whether this is a deliberate strategy of the labour office management.

The computer program used by line workers for client work ("OK-work" information system) is assessed by some workers as fast, understandable, and clear, allowing the insertion of records from client meetings outside the prescribed items[92]. Although all surveyed workers consider it functional, *many of them consider it outdated and inflexible*. This is reflected in particular (i) its lack of clarity and complicated usability[93], (ii) the presence of an unupdated list of job positions (CZ.ISCED) from the 1990s, which contains job positions that no longer exist and at the same time does not contain current, previously non-existent job positions, (iii) the impossibility of inserting new employer organisations into the system and (iv) the system's disconnection from the internet. These facts increase

[91] *"These clients would need, for example, a social worker to be here and take them straight away from me and go together to solve specific problems. Even if they leave me motivated and enthusiastic, they will not use it anymore. They will find it complicated to approach workers from another part of the city. They will not find the strength to do it. It is such a shame that we do not go into the field with them."* (R15A)

[92] *"The OK-Work program works well. The response is quite fast. Maybe your colleague at the Office Centre told you that it doesn't work very well there. We all know that. With us, it's faster. It's clear. It also tells a lot about a specific intermediary. We can write more than was included in the individual columns."* (R23B MNG)

[93] *"It's often a 'click-and-click' process, you have to click a series of actions in advance."* (R4A, R6A)

the time required for line workers to operate the system.[94] On the other hand, workers positively evaluate the data box, which is fast and very useful.

Many workers explicitly highlighted the problem of insufficient digitalisation of the *state administration.* This lies mainly in (i) the systemic disconnection of LOoCR with other administrative bodies, especially with the Social Security Administration system, which has information on employment contracts of job seekers. A significant problem is also (ii) the impossibility of submitting original documents in digital form. This fact leads to *excessive formality in some line workers' processes and procedures, time delays, increased administrative activities, and greater time pressures*. For this reason, some workers described the existing work procedures as “ossified”, “too formal” (R4A, R5A). An example of the consequences of the absence of digitalisation is a situation in which a job seeker fails to present the employment confirmation required for registration. In this case, the worker must write to the Social Security Administration requesting this confirmation, *"which requires time to write a letter, mark the email with a registration number, then, due to the lack of an electronic signature, it is necessary to print, stamp, sign, scan the obtained contract..."* (R5A). The interconnection of information systems would make work processes more efficient, *"for example, it would be possible to find out work history, executions etc. based on the personal identification number"* (R7A).

Communication Resources: Communication and Cooperation of Line Workers with Actors Inside and Outside the Labour Office

At both types of workplaces, at the time of the survey, there was only individual communication within the labour office between line workers and three types of workers: (i) with workers from the same workplace[95], (ii) from other departments, and (iii) with the line manager/supervisors[96]. There is no communication between line workers and their senior managers, who are their managers' superiors, because the line manager serves as the sole mediator. While workers implementing the European project view this as

[94] *"For example, I sit for fifteen minutes looking for what job position to assign the applicant to, and it often happens that after closing the file, I give it to the verifier, who returns the file to me, saying that she does not like the assignment and wants to change it."* (R5A)

[95] The workplace implementing a European project also involves communication with line workers from other contact workplaces in the region.

[96] In a workplace implementing a European project, both the "project manager" and his/her deputy, the so-called "project coordinator", can be considered a leader.

functional and practical, some workers implementing the LMP evaluate it negatively, arguing that senior managers are not very interested in line workers.[97]

In the first case, there is often *daily, mutual communication among colleagues in the same workplace, who share experiences and provide specific advice and assistance to solve individual clients' problems*. This communication is evaluated very positively in both types of workplaces in the surveyed locations. There is also often communication among line workers in the same workplace, who review *their work procedures*. These are the so-called "Client File verifiers", who check the presence and correctness of all information provided in the file.

In the second case, line workers *communicate with workers from other departments of the Labour Office or with affiliated contact offices* of the Labour Office of the Czech Republic regarding their clients' specific needs. Most often, these are workers in material need who handle social benefits, social care workers who provide care for children and adults, retraining workers who intervene in the field of education, and specialised advisors who provide diagnostics and specific counselling. At the same time, there is *mutual communication between workers from workplaces implementing the European project and those implementing the LMP*, who are the first to engage with clients. While cooperation between line workers from both workplaces and workers from other departments was evaluated positively in location A, in some workplaces in location B, workers requested increased and improved cooperation, especially with social workers and workers in material need.

In the third case, communication between line workers and their manager occurs via email, personal meetings, and phone calls. The subject of email communication is primarily the transmission of the above-mentioned current information across both types of workplaces. In workplaces implementing a European project, email communication is also used to regularly send monthly reports on the ongoing fulfilment of project indicators by individual workers, with a possible request for their fulfilment. Even though the managers of these workplaces in both locations do not explicitly pressure their employees to perform,

[97] *"The union leaders are not interested in our work, they act like 'honorary people'. They consider us, the clerks 'down there', as 'stupid'."* (R3A)

knowing that other colleagues fulfil the indicators *motivates them to perform better, "so that they are not the last".*

Personal meetings take place at both types of workplaces, either in the form of (i) *group meetings between the manager and line workers of the given workplace* or (ii) *individual meetings between the manager and individual workers*. The subject of the meetings between the manager and the workers of the given workplace is usually to resolve specific situations and problems of some clients, systemic matters of an administrative nature (e.g., principles and procedures for managing the Client File), and meeting the requirements of other workplaces (e.g., selecting clients for workers from other workplaces who provide specialised services). The subject of these meetings between managers and individual workers is often to evaluate line workers' performance and provide relevant feedback. In the case of LMP workplaces, this is the result of an assessment based on information from the Client File, the "OK-work" information system, and other workers at the labour office with whom the line worker cooperates. In the case of the ESF+ workplace, the assessment also evaluates the fulfilment of predetermined project indicators.

Workers from both types of workplaces in both locations consider *meetings with their line managers useful and necessary*, and they rate communication and cooperation as “excellent”. They all clearly agree that their managers possess the key competencies that enable line workers to manage and resolve complex, often highly psychologically demanding work situations while delivering high-quality performance. These include (i) the willingness and ability to communicate openly, (ii) to inspire feelings of trust, to advise on everything, to calm down, to diplomatically resolve various problems, and at the same time (iii) to demand performance without unnecessary pressure and to give quality feedback (see Figure 5.10 for more details). The use of competencies acquired through experience in line work earns managers respect among line workers.

Figure 5.10 Key competencies of managers in the form of functions used by line workers and their manifestations

CREDIBILITY: *Ability to inspire feelings of trust*	• *"If* necessary*, you can contact her at any time."* (R2A), *"I have a positive relationship with her, and if necessary, she will help solve any issues."* (R6A), • *"She is very* personal*, human, accessible."* (R7A)*, "The manager is great."* (R4A)*, "I am such a self-motivated person, so I do not need much from outside. We have great management. We can come up with anything. We have a good atmosphere here*." (R1B), *"We pass on the so-called Cookbook among colleagues. It is a written procedure for working with a client and moving forward. If something is not clear to me, I have someone to turn to."* (R16B)*, "I feel that I can rely on the manager."* (R20B)
COMMUNICATIVENESS	• *"She regularly visits the offices, communicates in person or by email when necessary."* (R2A), *"She is always there. When I need something, sometimes I do not even have time to get to her because she arrives even earlier."* (R17B)
COUNSELLING: *Willingness and ability to deal with everything*	• *"She gives advice on everything, how to act in a specific situation with a client, how to deal with client aggression."* (R3A), *"She understands our problems, she understands that our work is demanding, she is human in the presentation and the need to implement new, albeit rough instructions from above."* (R7A), *"Even though I try to solve everything myself, if necessary, I can turn to her at any time, go to her, discuss anything with her*." (R4A), *"When working with employers, I am often outside the building. I have enough space to do my work. We always agree with the manager, we solve what is needed. She is beneficial to me*." (R23B MNG)
SUPPORT: *Willingness and ability to support*	• *"The manager is helpful and willing, she is interested in us and our problems,* she *walks through the workplace at least once a day, she tries to keep us in a good mood."* (R4A)*, "We manage to share good experiences, good practice, what we have succeeded in and thanks to what. It is inspiring for us. Mutual enrichment motivates and strengthens me. We have it set up that way."* (R15B)*, "She has much experience with clients, so she always knows how to solve a given situation. When I am struggling, she helps me."* (R17B)
CONFLICT MITIGATION: *Ability to calm down the client*	• *"She does not stress, she is easy going, she calms me down, she approaches things in a* way *that if it is not about life, it is not about anything, everything can be solved."* (R5A)*, "She has much experience, she knows that everything can be solved. That calms me down."* (R22B)
PROTECTION: *Willingness and ability to protect workers*	• *"She tries to* protect *us, defend us, in the maximum possible way, because they know that our work is difficult*." (R8A)
PROBLEM SOLVING: *The ability to solve problems in a matter-of-fact, diplomatic and practical manner*	• *"She has an extraordinary ability to solve problems. He can diplomatically calm down* problematic *clients."* (R5a)*, "She knows how to treat clients, how to solve difficult cases."* (R22B)
REQUIREMENT OF (QUALITY) PERFORMANCE	• *"She demands performance, but he does not create explicit pressure to work like a slave* owner*."* (R7A)*, "It is not like we have a beach house, but it is not like they are ripping us off. She knows how it works here. The expectations are pretty reasonable, I would say."* (R18B)
FEEDBACK: *The ability to give quality feedback*	• *"The manager gives excellent feedback, passes on reports from the methodologist, and* provides *individual consultations according to our needs."* (R4a)*, "We receive feedback regularly. When listening to and reviewing our work, the manager always identifies areas for improvement, but she does not present them as failures. More like motivation to improve."* (R18B)

Source: author based on the analysed data

Line workers also communicate with external actors outside the labour office. In particular, workers from workplaces implementing LMP communicate with a broader range of actors, which include primarily (i) the Trade Licensing Office and health insurance companies to process employment support, (ii) the Social Security Administration to determine employee status, business registration, and provide old-age and disability pensions, (iii) employers, (iv) doctors, and (v) courts or executors. Workers implementing the European youth project we examined, by contrast, primarily communicate with employers to create new job vacancies for their clients. On the other hand, due to limited competencies among both types of employees and limited time capacity among LMP workers, *there is no direct communication with non-profit organisations*. They have the capacity, time, and professional potential to directly or indirectly influence clients' employability and employment by providing comprehensive services that focus not only on the employment area but also on other problem areas previously mentioned that affect clients' employability. In reality, *line workers, in most cases, only provide clients with contact details for* these organisations by handing out leaflets. Line workers consider contacts with people from non-profit organisations, most often social workers, who have the potential to assist with job applications for specific client groups (e.g., ethnic minorities, people with disabilities) beneficial.

Financial Resources: Salary, Financial Benefits

In the field of remuneration, *workers in workplaces implementing LMP are paid less than workers in workplaces implementing European projects, who often have higher vocational or university education and, in addition,* are eligible to receive higher remuneration under European projects. In the case of workers implementing LMP, these remunerations, the so-called annual "Employee Performance Evaluation" carried out by the manager, are only given once a year and have stagnated in recent years. *Unequal salaries and, at the same time, a higher workload for LMP workers, who have many more clients, cause tensions and feelings of injustice among these workers*. Moreover, the table salaries are not high. For this reason, the vast majority of workers in both types of workplaces in both locations would welcome an increase in their current salaries. Even though some respondents state that "the money is not much" (R2A), "the financial evaluation is bad" (R5A), "it is not a

glory" (R15B), the majority are satisfied with them and assess the current situation as "sufficient" (R14A), most often "that it could be better" (R8A, R17B, R18B, R21B, R22B, R28B). *In addition to financial compensation, no other non-monetary benefits are provided to employees.*

5.2.6 Organisational Policy Shaped by Various External and Internal Actors and Targeting and Influencing the Recruitment and Capacity Building of Line Workers, the Resources Available to Them, and the Way They View and Solve the Problem

An organisational policy can be seen as a set of explicit measures and implicit requirements that can influence the context and manner of public service delivery. These measures and interests are usually the result of the interests, expectations, and strategies of various intra-organisational and extra-organisational actors, especially the media, politicians, professional groups, scientists/researchers, citizens, clients, and client interest groups. In our opinion, three sub-policies of the organisation can be identified in this context, each with a distinct focus on personnel capacities, organisational resources, and the perception and resolution of problems faced by users of line-worker-provided services.

The information we have obtained shows that *"the Labour Office of the Czech Republic policy focused on the recruitment of new employees and the strengthening of the capacities of existing employees",* provided by HR specialists, senior managers, and line managers, is adequate (for more details, see subchapter 5.2.4 above)[98]. The jobs intended for newly recruited line workers are, in fact, open to all persons on the labour market who have achieved at least secondary education, regardless of their field of specialisation. Hired employees also have the opportunity to complete various educational and training programs that help them expand their knowledge, better manage administrative activities, solve problems, and work effectively with diverse clients.

"The organisational policy ensuring organisational resources used by line workers" in their work is significantly shaped, in particular, by the strategies of HR professionals, IT specialists, and line managers. These are influenced, in particular, by the availability and adequacy of financial resources for their renovation and renewal. The information obtained

[98] This concerns the area of "Internal capacities of line workers", which includes completed training/civil service exams, as well as educational and training programs.

for this area (see subchapter 5.2.5 above)[99] shows that *the organisation's LOoCR policy is inconsistent between different types of workplaces occupied by line workers. Especially at the workplaces of line workers implementing LMP, it is possible to identify following many shortcomings* that affect the course and method of service provision: (i) the number of workers is undersized and it thus does not cover the number of clients, (ii) the time devoted to individual clients is insufficient and it thus makes impossible to pay in-depth attention to their problems, (iii) the rules regulating the activities of line workers are overgrown and variable which requires constant training, (iv) there are usually two or more workers at one workplace which makes it impossible to address clients anonymously, (v) technological and information resources are functional, but outdated which requires high time costs, (vi) the level of wages is low compared to salaries in the for-profit sector which causes lower interest in work at employment offices and high turnover of existing employees. (vii) Even though communication between various line workers and with managers within the labour office is of good quality, direct cooperation with many external actors, especially from the non-profit sector, is insufficient.

"Organisational policy influencing the perception of the problem being solved and the resulting form of services provided by line workers" of individual labour offices at the regional and local levels can be significantly shaped by the strategies of diverse actors. In this context, it is possible, in our opinion, to hypothetically distinguish two groups of actors who differ in which aspects of the service provision process they can influence.

In the first case, these actors have the potential to influence how line workers perceive the problem they are solving, how they view individual client types among job seekers, and how they assess their potential for assistance. For example, from the point of view of whether they do not need, do not want, or need support and assistance; see more in subchapter 5.2.2 above. These actors may include *employees from various organisational workplaces and levels of the Public Employment Services and Labour Market Policy system*, more specifically, colleagues of line workers at the same workplace, line workers from other departments, managers, directors, representatives of central PES bodies, and/or the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and then the clients themselves. At the same time,

[99] This is the area of "Organisational Resources" available to line workers, which includes personnel, time, space, legislative, technological, communication, and information resources.

this may include external actors beyond the PES system, particularly client interest groups, citizens, media, politicians, professional groups, and scientists/researchers. Our findings in this context show that *how line workers view and assess different types of job applicants is influenced primarily by the attitudes and experiences of individual line workers and their colleagues in the workplace, who together share* experiences of working with clients. Line workers often assess clients based on experiences gained during interviews with individual clients, as they try to help all of them, regardless of their level of motivation to work or the severity of their disabilities. They are increasingly inclined to help, especially those clients who they know are disadvantaged on the labour market, especially mothers with children, older people of pre-retirement age, and refugees from Ukraine, and at the same time, all clients who actively communicate during individual meetings and are motivated to solve their unemployment-related situation. *The influence of external actors' attitudes on line workers' actions is thus minimal or latent*[100]. This is despite the widespread view among employers and a significant portion of the public that labour office workers should not provide support or assistance to unemployed people who are unemployable benefit recipients and do not want to work.

In the second case, there are *actors who have the potential to influence the goals, type, scope and quality of the work procedures used and the overall performance of line workers*, e.g., how line workers deal with different kinds of clients, whether they provide them with job-search assistance, psychosocial individualized support, counselling, help, and/or use sanctions (for more details see subchapter 5.2.1 above - Goals pursued by line workers when dealing with clients)[101]. These actors primarily include line managers and senior managers, who have the authority to directly or indirectly manage, coordinate, and control line workers through mechanisms that roughly align with existing management principles and are reflected in line workers' final approaches to client work. Most often, it is possible to identify a bureaucratic, professional, bureau-professional, or managerial approach (for more details, see chapter 2, subchapter 2.1.5). Our findings show that *the powers of line workers, which can be used for dealing with clients, are relatively broad in both types of*

[100] *"I follow politics and events in society, but I work according to my own discretion. I do not let myself be influenced. I work according to my best knowledge and conscience."* (R1B)

[101] This concerns the area of "Problem" to be solved by line workers, as well as the "Organisational Resources" available to them.

workplaces studied (i.e., implementing LMP and EU projects). Their scope is constrained solely by administrative activities required to comply with numerous pre-established rules and procedures, particularly legislative standards, methodologies, and guidelines. On the other hand, management, and especially line management, should expand the scope of individual client dealings, especially for clients who want and need support and assistance, rather than for those who do not. *The methods of management, coordination, and control of line workers used by managers are set in this context in such a way that they require line workers to fulfil administrative agendas accurately,* which is especially true for workers in European projects who monitor the fulfilment of baseline indicators, the non-fulfilment of which is subject to sanctions. At the same time, *managers direct line workers to devote themselves to clients in the maximum possible way "to be helpful and provide adequate services"* (R9A MNG). In fact, this means that *workers have the opportunity to deal with clients individually and professionally at their own discretion*, depending on their capacities, i.e., education, training, and work experience. However, its use is limited, especially for workers implementing LMP, due to insufficient organisational resources, including fewer workers per client, spatial constraints, limited time per client, and slow information technology (for more details, see subchapter 5.2.5 above).

The limits on organisational resources available to line workers are fully reflected in line managers' decisions in both locations studied. *Line managers perceive them as obstacles that significantly impede line workers' ability to fully dedicate themselves to individual clients. At the same time, line managers try to manage and coordinate line workers as much as possible so that they can function adequately and "survive" in these demanding working conditions*. Therefore they often (i) use informal communication in management and coordination, (ii) carry out control of line workers together with the verifiers of the Client File and senior managers so that the administrative activities performed by line workers are in accordance with the legislation and thus prevent criticism and sanctions in the event of control by external entities and (iii) at the same time so that the services provided to individual clients are as professional as possible, i.e. individual, focused on their specific needs and life situations.

Line managers also act as a "protective buffer" for line workers against external actors, particularly pressures from central authorities, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social

Affairs and the General Directorate of LOoCR. These regularly influence the working procedures of line workers ("they ensure more or less strict compliance with the rules", R19B) and, in turn, their work performance ("they demand reporting of numbers", R9A). In addition, there has been increasing pressure recently for line workers to pay close attention to the target group of unmotivated clients who "take benefits and do not want any services".

From the above, it follows that ***the individual work procedures and the actual performance of line workers are significantly influenced, on the one hand, by the need to comply with pre-established, essentially bureaucratic rules. At the same time, line workers are supported by their managers in providing professional, tailored services that meet the individual needs of clients interested in these services. However, limiting organisational resources, especially for LMP workers, results in behaviour that is a necessary combination of compliance with bureaucratic rules and monitoring clients' well-being to the greatest extent possible, and can therefore be described as bureau-professional.*** The workers surveyed are inclined to ***use more bureaucratic behaviour with clients who do not want public services, and conversely, more professional behaviour with those clients who want and need help.*** The managerial approach, which entails providing economically efficient services by workers who pursue their own self-interest through performance-based incentives and punishments set by superior managers, is not prevalent in the Czech Public Employment Services. The exception is the monitoring of performance indicators by line workers from workplaces implementing a European project, the observance of which is not forcibly enforced by superior workers represented by line and senior managers.

IV. FINAL PART

Chapter 6

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND CONSIDERATIONS ON THE USEFULNESS OF THE PROPOSED ANALYTICAL "MODEL" FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this chapter, we aim to condense the main findings of this work and provide a clear direction. First, *we summarise the findings from our analysis of labour market policy in the Czech Republic, presented in* Chapter 5. At the same time, *we compare them with the findings from existing research on the implementation of public policy at the line level,* which were presented mainly in chapters 1 to 4 (subchapter 6.1). Subsequently, we consider *the potential of our empirically tested "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers" for future research.* We are primarily focused on the potential of its contribution to advancing existing knowledge on public policy implementation at the line level and to mitigating or resolving the persistent shortcomings and challenges outlined in Chapter 6.1, subchapter 6.2.

More specifically, we will try to answer the following questions:

- ***"What key findings emerged from our analysis of labour market policy in the Czech Republic using the "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers""?***
- ***"How do our findings align with the existing literature, and what new findings have been identified?"***
- ***"How can the "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers" be used for current and future research?"***
- ***"Does this model have the potential to address ongoing implementation research issues, and if so, what specific ones?"***

6.1 Summary of Key Findings from the Analysis of Labour Market Policy in the Czech Republic through the "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers" and their Comparison with Previous Knowledge

In this section, we summarise the key findings from the detailed analysis of labour market policy in the Czech Republic presented in the previous chapter and compare them with the results of existing research on the implementation of public policy at the line level. We present these findings in the same order, i.e. first we provide information on the "political and organisational context" of addressing client unemployment by line workers implementing labour market policy (subchapter 6.1.1), then on the nature of the "problem solved" by line workers in the form of diverse client groups (subchapter 6.1.2), on the "problem-solving process" (subchapter 6.1.3), and on the influence of the individual areas of factors we monitored on the services provided, which represent the "internal capacities of line workers" (subchapter 6.1.4), the "organisational resources" available to them (subchapter 6.1.5), and the "organisational policy" shaped by external and internal actors (subchapter 6.1.6).

6.1.1 Political and Organisational Context of the Problem Being Addressed

Public employment services in the Czech Republic represent *a hierarchical system with centralised management* (the General Directorate of LOoCR) *of decentralised workplaces in individual regions* (Regional LOoCR) *and municipalities* (Local LOoCR), which is characterised by a unified/standardised organisational structure and processes of management, coordination, and control of line workplaces responsible for the implementation of labour market policy.

The key actors responsible for the implementation of labour market policy include primarily *line workers who are in direct contact with clients* and who are often referred to as "street-level bureaucrats" or "public workers" (Lipsky 1980, 2010), and sometimes also "boundary spanners" (William, 2002), "public professionals" (Tummers et al., 2009) or "public service professionals" (Tuurnas, 2015). Specifically, these are workers who can be divided into *three different groups*, which are distinguished from each other mainly in that they (i) *come from diverse workplaces* (departments), (ii) are *financed from various sources* (state budget versus European funds), (iii) *come into contact with different numbers of*

diverse types of clients at different times after they enter the labour office (contact with all clients immediately upon registration at the labour office versus contact with a smaller number of selected clients after registration at the labour office), and (iv) *provide services of different scope and specialization* (wide range versus narrowly specialized services). Specifically, these are workers from workplaces implementing state employment policy (LMP) or European projects (financed by ESF+), or from specialised professional and psychological counselling services (although our research focused on workers from the first two types of workplaces).

Under current legislation, line workers are responsible for providing information, advice, and employment placement services, which constitute the objectives of their work. Our findings showed that ***both types of workers we interviewed tried to achieve one or more of the following five types of objectives when working with clients*** (see also Figure 6.1, where individual objectives are ranked according to the frequency of their achievement): (i) "job-search assistance" related to finding and obtaining a job, (ii) "counselling" about benefits and services and possible procedures for resolving a specific life situation, (iii) "help" with provision of specific benefits and services to strengthen motivation to seek, obtain and maintain employment, (iv) "sanctioning" in form of removing clients from employment office registration and (v) "psychosocial individualised support" consisting of motivating clients to address their specific life situation in all its complexity actively. In this context, line workers may differ in how they achieve the goals of "counselling" and "job-search assistance" when clients face problems that do not explicitly relate to unemployment. Still, they may be its cause or consequence (e.g., debts, illnesses and addictions, crime, family and housing, the war in Ukraine).

Figure 6.1 Goals pursued by surveyed line workers of selected Czech Labour Offices when working with clients (ranked from most frequently to least frequently achieved goal)

Job-search assistance	• Information and assistance with finding and getting a job
Counselling	• Information about benefits and services, and possible procedures for resolving a specific life situation
Help	• Providing specific benefits and services to strengthen motivation to seek, obtain, and maintain employment
Sanctioning	• Removing clients from registration
Psychosocial individualised support	• Motivation of clients to actively address a given life situation in all its complexity

Source: author based on the analysed data

6.1.2 Problem Solved by Line Workers

Line workers of the labour office come into contact with a variety of clients. They can be divided into the following three different groups based on their level of motivation to deal with their specific life situations, accompanied by job loss, and their level of need for psychosocial individualised support and job-search assistance from line workers (see Figure 6.2 and also Van den Broeck & Vansteenkiste, 2023):

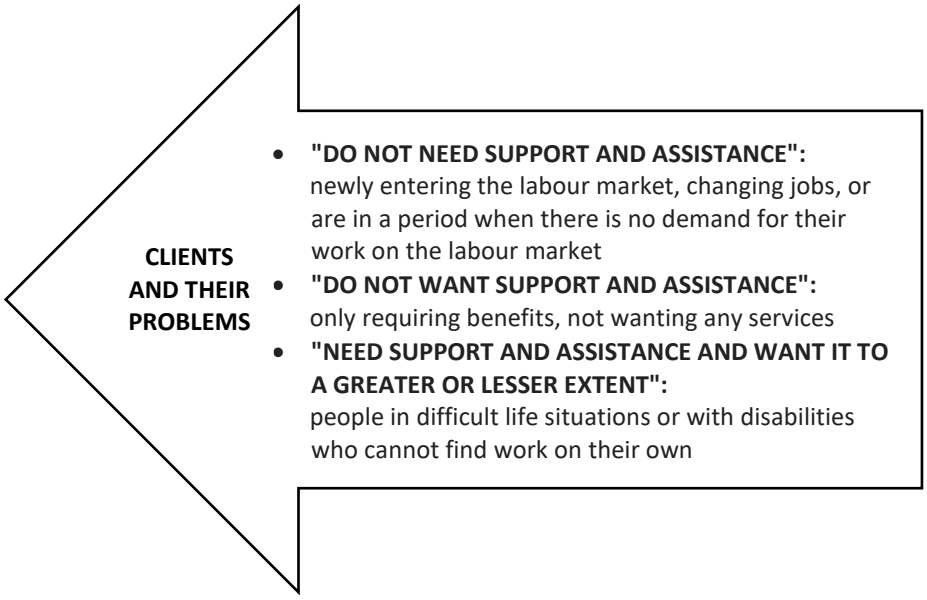
1) ***Motivated individuals who "do not need support and assistance"***, who have newly entered into the labour market, moved from one job to another or bridge the period when their work was not in demand in the labour market – these are usually "active" policy-clients (Gofen & Needham, 2015), who are often representatives of "cooperative" and "open" client types (Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b);
2) ***Unmotivated benefit recipients who "do not want support and assistance"*** (Gift & Lastra-Anadón, 2023), because they only require benefits and do not want any services – these are usually "passive actors" (Gofen, Sella & Gassner, 2019) often represented by "aggressive", "manipulative" (Davidovitz & Cohen, 2021) and from the perspective of employers, "hard-to-employ" clients (Butler et al., 2012), a significant part of whom are made up of persons of non-majority ethnicity;
3) ***People in difficult life situations or with disabilities who cannot find work themselves and therefore "need support and help and want it to a greater or lesser extent"*** – they are represented by both "active" and "passive actors" (Gofen, Sella & Gassner, 2019) of various types, who are usually "difficult to employ" due to multiple barriers or the specificity of their problems (Gal, Yagil & Luria, 2021).

While the first category of clients is the least numerous in the surveyed labour offices and does not require significant interventions from line workers, the second category of clients is often the most numerous and very difficult to work with. This group of clients deliberately resists line workers' activating interventions through various strategies, often directly or indirectly stressing and demotivating workers, thereby negatively affecting their well-being and performance (Szydlowski et al., 2022). These are primarily representatives of the so-called "cultural individualism" who consider themselves "their own bosses" and assertively compel public services from line workers because they believe they are entitled to them (Hupe, 2019a). The third category of clients, distinguishable into subcategories of

motivated and unmotivated citizens, is the most common target group with which line workers work intensively, purposefully, and with varying degrees of success within the limits of their available powers. Increased work motivation is directed primarily towards the subcategory of motivated clients.

While line workers from workplaces implementing exclusively state employment policy (LMP) come into contact with all these diverse types of clients, of which there are a large number and who are newly entering the labour office (they can thus be described as "generalised gate-keepers"), workers from workplaces implementing European projects (ESF+) come into contact with specific categories of more specifically specified persons, of which there are a smaller number, and who fall primarily into the third category of clients. Although the work environment of workers in both types of workplaces is complex (Lipsky 1980, 2010; Vinzant & Crothers, 1998; Austin et al., 2009; van Berkel et al., 2017; Piatak & Jensen, 2024) and has continued to increase in recent years (Borghi & van Berkel, 2007; Møller & Stone, 2013; Bannink & Wijk, 2015; Hupe & van Kooten, 2015; Miller, 2024), workers from the first type of workplace (LMP) are visibly exposed to much more challenging working conditions that create dilemmas than workers from the second type of workplace (ESF+).

Figure 6.2 Categories of clients with whom the surveyed line workers of selected Labour Offices of the Czech Republic come into contact, sorted by the degree of motivation and need for support and assistance



Source: author based on the analysed data

6.1.3 Problem-Solving Process: Line Worker Workflows

Line workers from both types of workplaces and in both locations tried to use work procedures that were in accordance with *the four-phase model of the problem-solving process* we proposed when dealing with different types of clients and solving their problems, which includes: (1) *"Problem mapping and evaluation"* of the given client, i.e. their life situation, problems and needs to create a personal and work history, which involves a more or less conscious classification of clients into one of the three types of client categories mentioned above according to the degree of their motivation and need for support and assistance, which influences the choice of subsequent work procedures (phases) of the line worker with the client, (2) *"Determining tasks and choosing procedures and tools to achieve them"*, which consists of deciding on adequate goals and services that will lead to solving the life situations, problems and needs of the client identified in the previous phase, (3) *"Providing tools and monitoring their use"* and (4) *"Evaluation of the suitability and impact of chosen procedures and tools on the solved problem"*, which in fact represents both a process control of the selected work procedures and tools, and impact control of the degree of their influence on solving the client's life situation, problems and needs. If the client remains unemployed, the worker typically revisits the following work procedure and returns to the second phase of engagement.

Our findings showed that during the ***"Problem mapping and evaluation" phase***, the interviewed workers sought to engage all their clients individually, without bias, from the initial contact onward. They thus seek to play the role of public actors who "believe in a just world" (Hupe et al., 2015a, b) or who seek to address "social inequalities" (Lotta & Pires, 2019), as these reflect an unequal distribution of power, knowledge, income, and opportunities in society. On the other hand, the workers admitted that *they more or less consciously try to help as much as possible, especially clients from the third category of job seekers who are in a difficult life situation or have some disadvantages* that they cannot afford and at the same time have more or less motivation to solve their situations (especially women with children, people of pre-retirement age who have worked their whole lives, refugees from Ukraine). On the contrary, unmotivated clients are a frequent source of prejudice among line workers, even though the workers surveyed attempt to eliminate such prejudice, albeit with varying success, and approach all clients impartially.

In fact, there is a “prioritisation” and conscious “favouritism” of some clients over others (Meier & Nicholson-Crotty, 2006; Atkins, Fertig, & Wilkins 2014; Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2019; Gershogern & Cohen, 2023) based on stereotypes (Brodkin & Majmundar, 2010; Harrits & Møller, 2014; Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2018; Visser, de Koster, and van Buuren 2024) and experience with communication with clients (Raaphorst & Loyens, 2020), which results in their categorization (Oberfield, 2014; Raaphorst & van de Walle, 2017; Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b) based on positive or negative attitudes towards different types of clients formed during communication (Keulemans & de Walle, 2020b). They approach the problem-free clients of the first and third types mentioned above (subchapter 6.2.1) as clients who “deserve help” (Wilkins & Wenger, 2014) and therefore act in the role of “client-oriented bureaucrats” (Kroeger, 1975), or “citizen agents” (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000, 2003, 2022), “service providers” (Van Berkel, Caswell, Kupka and Larsen 2017; Van Berkel 2017a, b) or “agents of the welfare state” (Jewell, 2007). On the other hand, they approach the problem of clients of the second type, who are unmotivated benefit recipients who do not deserve help (Wilkins & Wenger, 2015), in the role of bureaucrats with a “condemnatory moralistic view” (Stone, 1981), or as “state agents” (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2000, 2003, 2022).

In the phase of ***"Determining tasks and choosing procedures and tools to achieve them"***, line workers primarily consider offering clients services that are closely related to their unemployment, because they are entirely within their jurisdiction, in particular, passive and active employment policy tools in the form of contributions and benefits, diagnostics, motivational and advisory tools, retraining programs, etc. At the same time, *workers often consider using services offered by external organisations that can help solve the problems of their clients that may be the cause or consequence of their unemployment and are not under the jurisdiction of the Labour Office of the Czech Republic*; in particular, these are the areas of housing, health, addictions, crime, debts, migration as a result of the war in Ukraine, etc. In this context, during the ***"Providing tools and monitoring their use"*** phase, clients most often only report on the offers of these organisations because they lack sufficient authority or time capacity to cooperate directly with them, except for refugees from Ukraine. In the Czech Republic, unlike in other countries such as Austria or Germany, the absence of institutionalised cooperation between the Labour Office of the Czech

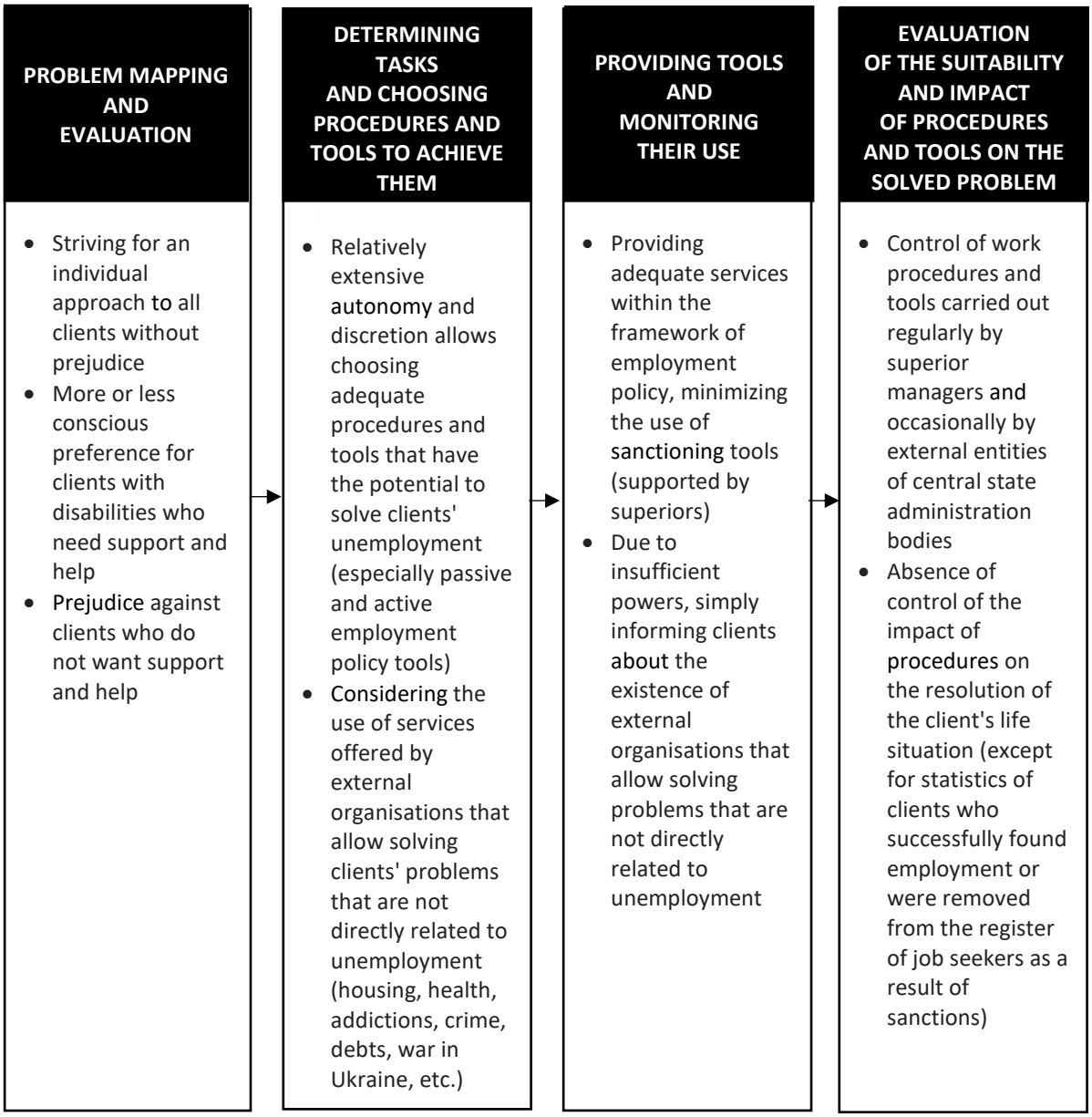
Republic and non-governmental organisations prevents the provision of comprehensive, integrated, *client-focused services based on a "holistic approach"* (Montero et al., 2016). In other words, there are no multidisciplinary cooperating actors located in networks across organisations and sectors (Saltkjel, Andreassen & Minkman, 2022; Minkman, 2023), which would be based on "hybrid governance" (Hupe & Meijs, 2000; Vakkuri et al., 2021; Torfing et al., 2025) and use "hybrid professionalism" (Noordegraaf, 2015, 2019; Breit et al., 2024). These networks represent "collaborative governance" (Ansell, Sørensen & Torfing, 2025; Ongaro et al., 2025) and they are demonstrably a source of so-called "collaborative innovation" (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011, 2016; Torfing, 2019, 2023; Trein, Presset & Vagionaki, 2025), which has positive impacts on the users of the services provided (Lindsay et al., 2020; Gallouj et al., 2023).

The analysis of the last phase of negotiations with clients, focused on ***"Evaluation of the suitability and impact of chosen procedures and tools on the solved problem",*** showed that *process control of work procedures and tools is implemented to a sufficient extent*. It is carried out by line workers during work with clients, by regular checks by superior managers, and then by random checks by external entities of central public administration bodies, most often by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the General Directorate of LOoCR, and, in the case of financial resources, by the Ministry of Finance. On the other hand, *the impact of these procedures on individual clients' life situations is not controlled, except through statistics on* clients who successfully found employment or were removed from the register of job seekers. The reason for this fact is the absence of the introduction of the principles of New Public Management into the Czech public administration, which is based, among other things, on the systematic collection of data and the control of achieved results (for more details, see e.g., Soss, Fording & Schram, 2011; Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2015; Evans, 2016; Radnor, Osborne & Glennon, 2022; Krogh & Triantafillou, 2024).

The key finding is that ***all interviewed line workers from both locations have sufficient and relatively extensive autonomy and discretion to map and assess client problems and subsequently decide on the type and method of service provision.*** This includes discretion in the areas of "service delivery process" and "outputs" for individual clients (Vinzant & Crothers, 1998; Henderson & Pandey, 2013), as well as "value" discretion enabling the use of sound and ethical judgment, and "rules" and "administrative" discretion that allow for

adaptation of rules to unforeseen and complex situations and successfully dealing with limited resources (Ellis, 2011). These areas and types of discretion allow line workers to choose adequate procedures and tools and thus respond to the real needs and problems of motivated clients, while at the same time sanctioning unmotivated, lax, and uncooperative clients. At the same time, relatively extensive discretion allows them to choose adequate strategies not only of (i) “cognitive coping”, mainly in the form of compassion for motivated clients and, conversely, emotional distance from unmotivated clients, but also (ii) “behavioural coping” in the provision of services, mainly in the form of “bending the rules” in favour of motivated clients or, conversely, “strict enforcement of the rules” for unmotivated clients (Tummers, 2012; Tummers, Steijn & Bekkers 2012; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014; Tummers et al., 2015; Tummers & Bekkers, 2020; Falkenhain & Hirseland, 2024). On the other hand, line workers are encouraged by their superior line managers to use sanctioning tools only in exceptional situations and to provide so-called “tailor-made” services not only to motivated clients, but also to unmotivated clients. The reason is that, in both locations and across all types of workplaces, line managers had personal experience performing line work and its demands, particularly with a large number of clients and a high administrative burden. Their demand that subordinate line workers be helpful to all types of clients thus effectively represented a stress-reduction strategy for these workers (Eldor, 2017; Møller & Grøn, 2023; Judege et al., 2025).

Figure 6.3 The process of providing services to clients surveyed by line workers of selected Labour Offices of the Czech Republic



Source: author based on the analysed data

6.1.4 Internal Capacities of Line Workers

The mode and quality of services provided by line workers are significantly influenced by their internal capacities, which are typically shaped by education level, work experience, and completed training. While workers in workplaces implementing a European project primarily have a university education, with a non-technical or technical focus, the vast majority of workers in workplaces implementing LMP in both locations have a secondary education, with a school-leaving certificate in various fields (most often economic, general,

or pedagogical). A possible reason for this fact is the higher demands placed on the recruitment of workers implementing European projects and the higher psychological needs of the work of workers implementing LMP, who are exposed to great work stress as a result of dealing with a large number of often unmotivated clients, and at the same time the willingness of these workers with lower education to work for lower wages. The ***heterogeneity of educational attainment among line workers*** in both types of workplaces is consistent with the situation in the vast majority of foreign countries, where these workers also represent various professions (Caswell, Kupka, Larsen, & van Berkel, 2017; Van Berkel & Knies, 2018; Ohls, 2020; Peeters & Campos, 2022). Thus, when providing public services to individual clients, line workers does not "practising a (certain) profession" but "practising professionalism" in the sense that they provide individualized services that are "tailored" to the needs of a specific client and are usually the result of their "partnership" and "mutual cooperation" (Jewell, 2007; Sainsbury, 2008; Rice, 2017; Hupe & Evans, 2020; van Berkel et al., 2022; van Berkel, 2023; Keulemans & van Zijl, 2025).

Our findings show that *the prerequisite for quality provision of services by line workers of both types of workplaces to individual clients* is not – according to the opinion of managers and line workers themselves - the level and type of education achieved, but (i) the personal disposition of workers motivated by the desire to help others such as empathy, helpfulness, trustworthiness, communication skills, ability to propose appropriate solutions to problems, (ii) practical experience in dealing with different types of clients, (iii) internal motivation to perform this type of work and (iv) strengthening of this motivation by colleagues through support, by superiors through support, praise, financial reward and possibly also by clients through thanks. In the first case, the personality dispositions we have identified are in line with previous findings that highlight the importance of "emotional skills" including, in addition to "empathy" (Jensen & Pedersen, 2017; Edlins, 2021; Eshuis, De Boer & Klijn, 2023), also "emotional intelligence" as the ability to assess and work with clients' emotions (Eshuis, De Boer & Klijn, 2023; Levitats, 2024). These skills manifest themselves as "the capacity to develop relations of trust" and "to weigh up levels of knowledge about the client" (Murphy & Skillen, 2015). This requires "basic competence" and "user involvement" competence through the so-called "relational competences" and "tendency to psychologise activation work", which are the guarantee of

the ability of workers to manage communication processes and relationships with clients (Hagelund, 2016). The ability to propose appropriate solutions identified by us is consistent with the need for “creative skills” that guarantee imaginative problem-solving (Evans & Hupe, 2020) and also includes “legal competence” and “digital competence” (Hagelund, 2016; Budai, Csuhai & Tózsa, 2023). In the latter case, the need for work experience in negotiation has also been emphasised many times in the past (van Berkel & van der Aa, 2012; Henderson et al., 2017; Choi, Park & Lee, 2025). What is particularly important here is the type and duration of work experience (Evans & Harris, 2004) and its transferability among line workers (Wagenaar, 2020). In the latter case, our identified need for sufficient intrinsic motivation of line workers to perform a given type of work and its reinforcement is consistent with previous findings that show that “altruistic behaviour” of line workers motivated by universalistic morality (Evans, 2014) and “prosocial motivation” and job satisfaction (Henderson et al., 2017; Cohen & Lazebnik, 2025) are significant and beneficial. In line with the “satisfaction mirror” hypothesis, this satisfaction simultaneously leads to greater client satisfaction (Petrovsky & Yu, 2022; Meier, Prince & An, 2025), which, in turn, increases workers’ work engagement (Keulemans & de Walle, 2020b; Tu, Hsieh, Chen & Wen, 2023).

The performance of administrative work and the provision of specific social services by LOoCR line workers is also ensured by the fact that these workers (i) complete initial training at the given labour office on the Civil Service Act, the Employment Act, and their rights and obligations related to normal operations, (ii) are trained by a mentor from among more experienced colleagues from the same workplace, (iii) successfully pass a comprehensive and relatively demanding civil service exam in the field of Employment Services including the Employment Act and the Administrative Code, or (iv) have the opportunity to complete various educational and training programs focused especially on legislation, administration, communication with clients, solving client problems, burnout syndrome, European projects offered by the office, etc. In this context, it has been clearly demonstrated that completing training for line workers is a guarantee of high-quality public service delivery to citizens (e.g., Jewell & Glaser, 2006; Rice, 2012; Destler, 2017; Evans, 2020; Gallouj et al., 2023; Nor, 2025). The problem was that most education and training programs were either capacity-limited at the time of the interview or conducted online,

which was mainly negatively assessed by the workers. The workers particularly positively evaluated the benefits of communication courses, during which they had the opportunity to share their individual experiences with colleagues from workplaces of the Czech Labour Office in other regions. In this context, it has been shown that sharing experiences in this form positively affects "creative discretion" and the services provided (Walker, 2015; Forester, Verloo & Laws, 2023), thereby leading to the development of the implemented policy (Visser & Kruyen, 2021). Another frequent benefit of communication courses is learning to perceive clients and how to deal with them (Keulemans & de Walle, 2020b), or practising strategies for handling specific demanding work situations (Brehm & Gates, 1999; Moynihan & Pandey, 2008).

Figure 6.4 Capacities and motivation of surveyed line workers of selected Czech Labour Offices (ranked by the most important factor)

Work motivation	• Desire to help others/perform administration reinforced by colleagues and managers
Personal disposition and competences	• Ability to help others (empathy, helpfulness, trustworthiness, communication skills, ability to propose appropriate solutions to problems) (LMP, ESF+)
Work experience	• Experience in dealing with different types of clients
Completed educational and training programs	• High-quality and valuable, but unsystematic initial training, mentoring at the workplace, passing the civil service exam, possibility of completing specialised educational and training programs (LMP, ESF+)
Level and type of education attained	• High school with a high school diploma, regardless of field (LMP), university preference, regardless of field (ESF+)

Note: LMP = labour market policy, ESF+ = European Social Fund
Source: author based on the analysed data

6.1.5 Organisational Resources Available to Line Workers to Solve Problems

From the literature review and our own investigations, it emerged that line workers providing public services have seven key organisational resources at their disposal, which effectively shape their working conditions and significantly affect how services are provided. The following findings emerged from examining the nature and manner of using these organisational resources in the provision of public employment services by line workers of the Labour Offices of the Czech Republic we examined:

- ***Human resources***: type of workers and number of clients per worker. *The number of workers from workplaces implementing state employment policy is significantly lower*

and, in fact, undersized relative to other types of line workers surveyed by the labour offices (in our case, workers implementing European projects). This was manifested primarily by the fact that workers at this workplace were forced to serve a much larger number of clients (hundreds for state employment policy workers, compared to dozens for project workers). The insufficient number of line workers in public administration is a common problem (Kosar, 2011; Thomann, 2015; Barnes & Henly, 2018; Peeters & Campos, 2022). Its consequences include an extensive workload (Hill, 2006; Diefenbach, 2009; Brodkin, 2011a; Cheng & Wong, 2013; Stanica et al., 2022; Bell & Meyer, 2024). Conversely, when sufficient staffing is provided, line-level work problems are better managed (Dubois, 2010; Tummers et al., 2015).

- ***Time resources***: amount of time devoted to clients/administration. Even though *line workers implementing state employment policy had relatively limited time* (around 15 minutes on average) *to meet with individual clients* (given the high number and the enormous scope of administrative activities), their sufficient autonomy in time management enabled them to manage *this limitation*. The reason is mainly the adoption of a strategy of greater care for clients who show explicit interest in support and assistance, rather than for unmotivated clients. At the same time, it is a matter of workers coming to terms with the fact that they do not have enough time to prepare for a client meeting before the interview and to address the client's problems in greater depth during the interview itself. The above facts are consistent with the frequent problem of insufficient time (Kosar, 2011; Thomann, 2015) or with the time constraints faced by line workers in client meetings (Sainsbury, 2008; Thorén, 2008).
- ***Spatial resources***: number of employees in the office. A significant problem we did not encounter during the literature search was that all line workers interviewed from both types of workplaces in both locations were forced to deal with clients in office spaces they shared with other workers (at least one, and sometimes more). *This made it impossible to implement individual, private, and anonymous interactions* between line workers and individual clients, which would have enabled a more targeted solution to their particular problems (a larger number of workers were in workplaces implementing state employment policy).
- ***Legislative sources***: type and nature of the rules used, scope of powers of line workers. *Line workers are required to know and apply numerous legal documents (laws,*

methodologies, and guidelines) that define their powers and the administrative and non-administrative activities involved in client work. They regulate, in particular, client behaviour, work procedures, and the tools and measures provided. Given that these rules are subject to regular internal control by selected administrative workers and superiors and, at the same time, may be subject to random external control by workers from central state bodies (Directorate General of LOoCR, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and/or Ministry of Finance), their perfect knowledge and strict compliance are required. In this context, the interviewed workers negatively assessed in particular *the increasing number of amended laws, and excessive generality, strictness, or difficult enforceability of selected laws* (in particular, limited possibilities to activate inactive and unmotivated clients and the possibility of their return to the labour office after their exclusion after a specified period has elapsed). In the first case, this is a typical manifestation of "rule piling" arising from the constant creation of new rules in most contemporary developed states (Hupe, 2019a), which imposes a rule burden on workers (Stanica et al., 2022; Madsen, 2024). In the second case, this is a well-known fact concerning the "ambiguous and unclear form of formal policy and its goals", including the goals of implementing organisations (Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, 2022; Sandfort, 2000; Brodkin, 2003; Fowler, 2023). Their manifestation is the form of legislative and organisational rules, which are also often described as "ambiguous" or "contradictory" (Lipsky, 1980, 2010), "incomplete", "inappropriate" or "vague" (Handler, 1986; Vinzant & Crothers, 1998), or "constrained" (Moynihan, Herd & Harvey, 2014).

Despite these difficulties, line workers stated that *they have sufficient, if not extensive, room for manoeuvre to decide which specific services to provide to clients and in what order*. On the other hand, they admitted that their powers, which focus exclusively on employment matters, together with insufficient time for negotiations with clients, do not allow them to resolve clients' problems, whether complex or specific, systematically, that fall outside their competence. For example, in the form of cooperation with state and/or non-state organisations focused on issues in the area of health, addiction, indebtedness, housing, etc. This is a consequence of the aforementioned absence of institutionalised cooperation between the Labour Office of the Czech Republic and, in particular, non-state specialised organisations, which

would enable the provision of comprehensive and “tailor-made” professional services to clients (see subchapter 6.1.3 above).

- ***Technological and information resources***: availability and quality of equipment and software, degree of digitalisation of administration. *The vast majority of line workers have outdated but functional computers, software, and printers at their disposal, and they do not report significant issues with them*. The exceptions are positively evaluated data boxes, whereas criticism concerns the slow internet and the computer program for working with clients. This was negatively evaluated primarily by younger workers for its lack of clarity, complex and time-consuming usability, outdated information, and internet connectivity issues. The consequence of this deficiency is that line workers occasionally encounter “limited” or “insufficient” information (Hill, 2003; Riccucci et al., 2004; Kosar, 2011; Thomann, 2015; Irani et al., 2023). Despite the aforementioned technical problems, the surveyed workers strive to accommodate groups of motivated clients (Tummers & Rocco, 2018).

  Some of the interviewed workers also explicitly pointed out *the problem of insufficient digitalisation of the state administration, which results in increased administrative workload, time delays, and pressure.* This is especially the case with the disconnection between information systems of state administration and local government, and the inability to submit original documents in digital form. The introduction of e-government should improve employee decision-making, enable the more productive use of various databases, and improve communication within and between organisations providing public services (Bovaird, 2005; Busch, Henriksen, and Sæbø, 2018; Alshallaqi, 2024). On the other hand, some authors argue that the more intensive use of ICT also has its downsides because it can reduce or completely limit the discretion of workers (Buffat, 2015; Schuppan, 2015; de Boer & Raaphorst, 2023; Nyansiro, Mtebe & Kissaka, 2021; Nyansiro, Mtebe & Kissaka, 2021; Nyansiro, Mtebe & Kissaka, 2021; Lee & Yeo, 2024) and it is therefore desirable not to completely replace the contact of line workers with clients "face-to-face" via the so-called "machine bureaucracies" (Considine et al., 2022), as this could lead to a loss of fairness in solving complex cases (Bovens & Zouridis, 2002; cf. Stivers et al., 2023).
- ***Communication sources***: type, frequency, quality, and direction of communication with internal workers and external actors. The manner in which line workers provide

services to individual clients is significantly influenced by the communication processes that typically occur between them and various internal and external actors. Our findings showed that *line workers in both types of workplaces and locations predominantly use horizontal communication channels with actors within the labour office*. The most common communication is (i) with other line workers, especially colleagues, and (ii) with a senior employee represented by a line manager from a given department, and then (iii) with line workers from other departments, while communication with hierarchically higher-ranking employees of the labour office, represented by senior and office managers, does not occur. The subject of this internal communication, which most often takes the form of individual meetings, telephone or email communication, or group meetings, is, for all types of actors, the exchange of information and experience needed to solve specific problems for particular clients. These findings align with previous research, which shows that interaction and communication among office line workers primarily serve to transfer information and knowledge and to share experiences. This allows learning how to solve various things and thus facilitate on-the-job learning (Oberfield, 2014; Siciliano, 2015), how to implement some new activities when implementing reforms or innovations (Andersen & Jakobsen, 2016; Henderson, 2013; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012; Nisar & Maroulis, 2017; van Hout et al., 2024), or how to manage a high workload (Berlin et al., 2022). Repetitive interactions between workers also often help to shape the role expected of workers, to strengthen group identity (Brehm & Gates, 1999; Goodsell, 1981; Keiser, 2010; Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, 2022; Oberfield, 2014; Sandfort, 2000; Vinzant & Crothers, 1998; Jensen & Pedersen, 2023), or to provide emotional support and reduce negative emotions (Hsieh, 2014). In communication with a manager, it also involved conveying current information on legislation and administration and providing feedback on existing work procedures and overall work performance.

Line workers from both types of workplaces, especially those in workplaces implementing state employment policy, communicate with a relatively narrow group of external actors. They include employers and state institutions that provide information, tools, and measures to address specific client needs and problems, such as the Trade Licensing Office, health insurance companies, the Social Security

Administration, doctors, courts, and bailiffs. Workers implementing the European youth project we examined, by contrast, communicate primarily with employers. However, these are actors and institutions that address client problems related exclusively to unemployment, not to other problems that may be causes or consequences of unemployment and that are addressed by other policies (e.g., housing, health, security, migration).

All employees rated communication with colleagues and superior line managers very positively, particularly for its functionality and usefulness, and for the successful, high-quality handling of complex and often highly psychologically demanding work situations. Employees considered managers from all surveyed workplaces to be competent and respected personalities, who are characterised in particular by (i) willingness and ability to communicate openly, (ii) instil feelings of trust, be able to advise on everything, calm down, diplomatically solve various problems and at the same time (iii) demand performance without unnecessary pressure and give high-quality feedback. Line managers often helped to guide and teach line workers how to deal with different situations (Riccucci et al., 2004; Hill, 2006; Møller & Grøn, 2023; Alonso de Andrade & Pekkola, 2024), increased the clarity of rules (Zhang et al., 2021), and provided workers with "compassionate" and "sensitive" feelings of affection and care that supported their work performance and led to reduced stress in situations of high administrative burden (Eldor, 2017).

On the contrary, *limitations were observed in both locations, especially in communication with workers from other workplaces/departments, including regarding material needs and benefits*. At the same time, many workers pointed out the lack of direct communication with external actors, especially non-profit organisations, which could provide professional services to specific client groups, such as ethnic groups and people with disabilities. Although the workers would welcome this cooperation, their limited authority and time constraints make it impossible for them to establish it.

- ***Financial resources***: salary amount and financial benefits. *Workers in workplaces implementing state employment policies earn lower wages and receive less remuneration than those implementing European projects, yet are more heavily burdened by a larger* number of clients. This fact leads to tension and feelings of injustice among most of these workers, and, in their view, the solution is to increase

their current salaries. Insufficient financial resources for line workers are a common problem (Hupe & van der Krogt, 2014; Mützelburg, 2022) and often result from frequent budget cuts and subsequent austerity measures adopted by governments (Pollit & Bouckaert, 2017). The problem of low remuneration, together with the demanding nature of line workers' work, often leads to burnout (Hsieh, 2014; Grala, 2023) and, at times, to job turnover (Shim et al., 2017; Linos, Ruffini & Wilcoxen, 2022; Brassiolo, Estrada & Fajardo, 2024).

The findings presented above provide a comprehensive picture of how the seven key organisational resources we identified, which shape the working conditions of line workers, influence current service delivery across the two types of workplaces studied in both locations. The information obtained shows explicitly that ***there are inconsistencies in the area of personnel, time and financial resources between workplaces implementing LMP and workplaces implementing a European project***, to the detriment of the first type of workplace, which is characterized by (i) an insufficient number of employees due to the many times higher number of clients per employee, (ii) limited time for dealing with individual clients which forces the use of a strategy of selecting motivated clients who receive more care and (iii) lower remuneration of employees because workplaces implementing a European project have more generous funding. Furthermore, workers at both types of workplaces face limits in terms of spatial, legislative, technological, information and communication resources, which is reflected in (i) the presence of multiple workers in one office which makes it impossible to conduct anonymous interviews, during which clients would have the opportunity to communicate even sensitive problems, (ii) the requirement that workers perfectly know and apply a large number of legal documents although the problem is mainly legislative documents, the number of which is increasing due to amendments, they are often general, strict, difficult to enforce. Workers, on the other hand, have room to choose which specific services they will provide to clients, in what order, (iii) functional but outdated and slow technologies, which is reflected in noisy printers, slow internet, software with old information, unclear, with complicated operation and not connected to the internet, and the absence of digitalization of some administrative processes in form of disconnection of state administration information systems, inability to submit original documents in electronic form, which cause time delays, and (iv) narrowly

profiled but effective horizontal communication within the office exclusively with colleagues at the workplace, with the manager, with line workers from other departments and outside the office with employers and state institutions that have information and tools and measures that can be used to address clients' needs only in the area of employment, but without direct communication with other external actors (mainly non-profit organisations that can solve problems indirectly related to employment).

Figure 6.5 The nature of organisational resources available to line workers and the manifestations of their influence on working conditions and the service delivery process (ranked from most to least problematic factor/organisational resource)

ORGANISATIONAL RESOURCES AND THEIR NATURE		MANIFESTATIONS OF THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANISATIONAL RESOURCES ON WORKING CONDITIONS
PERSONNEL	• Low number of staff for high number of clients (LMP), sufficient number of staff for low number of clients (EP)	• Limited (LMP)/sufficient (ESF+) time for preparation and actual negotiations with the client solved by dedicating more time to motivated clients (LMP)
TIME	• Limited time (SPF), plenty of time (ESF+)	
SPATIAL	• High number of workers at the workplace (LMP-A), more workers at the workplace (LMP-B, ESF+)	• Impossibility of implementing individual, anonymous intervention with the client (LMP, ESF+)
LEGISLATIVE	• A large number of changing rules, clearly defined competencies focused exclusively on the area of employment (LMP, ESF+)	• Strict adherence to (regularly checked) rules, sufficient autonomy and decision-making space for choosing adequate services (SZ, ESF+)
TECHNOLOGICAL AND INFORMATION	• Outdated but functional, lack of digitalisation of processes (license plate, ESF+)	• Obsolescence and complicated usability of technology and software cause time delays and pressures (SZ, ESF+)
FINANCIAL	• Lower wage (LMP), average wage (EP)	• Feelings of underappreciation at work (LMP, EP), along with work stress and the risk of increased turnover (LMP)
COMMUNICATION	• High-quality horizontal and regular communication between line workers and the manager (individual, group, telephone, e-mail) and with selected state institutions that have information about clients, limits on cooperation with employees of some departments, absence of communication with senior employees of the labour office, and with external non-profit organisations focused on solving problems closely related to client unemployment (LMP, ESF+)	• Communication with all actors serves to transfer mutual information and experience that can be used to solve the problems of specific clients and to deal with work stress (LMP, ESF+)

Note: LMP = labour market policy, ESF+ = European Social Fund Plus
Source: author based on the analysed data

6.1.6 Organisational Policy Shaped by External and Internal Actors, Aimed at Recruiting and Strengthening the Capacities of Line Workers, the Resources Available to Them, and the Way They View and Solve the Problem

The provision of public services by line workers is often significantly influenced by the organisational policy, which can be "generally" perceived as a set of explicit measures and implicit requirements of various intra-organisational and possibly extra-organisational actors. To understand its real impact on public services provided by line workers, it is, in our opinion, desirable to determine in particular *the specific form/character and degree of influence of the following three "specific" types of measures and requirements (policies)*, which focus on (i) recruiting and strengthening personnel capacities of line workers by HR specialists, (ii) securing organisational resources available to line workers for working with clients primarily through HR specialists, IT specialists and line managers, and (iii) the perception of the nature of the problem being solved by line workers in the sense of viewing the need to help different types of clients, especially by employees from different organisational workplaces and levels of the Public Employment Services and Labor Market Policy system, clients and other external actors[102] and then the method of solving it especially by line managers and senior managers.

Specifically, our findings showed that:

- ***The "Human resource policy"*** *monitors the filling of line worker positions at both workplaces we examined by persons (i) who have achieved at least a secondary school education with a high school diploma, regardless of the field of study, (ii) who are characterized by personal dispositions and competencies focused on the desire and ability to help others* (especially empathy, helpfulness, trustworthiness, communication skills, ability to propose appropriate solutions to problems) *and (iii) whose capacities are strengthened by relevant procedures and programs* that employees evaluate mainly as high-quality and functional (completing entry training, learning from a mentor at the workplace, passing the civil service exam, and the possibility of completing specialized educational and training programs);

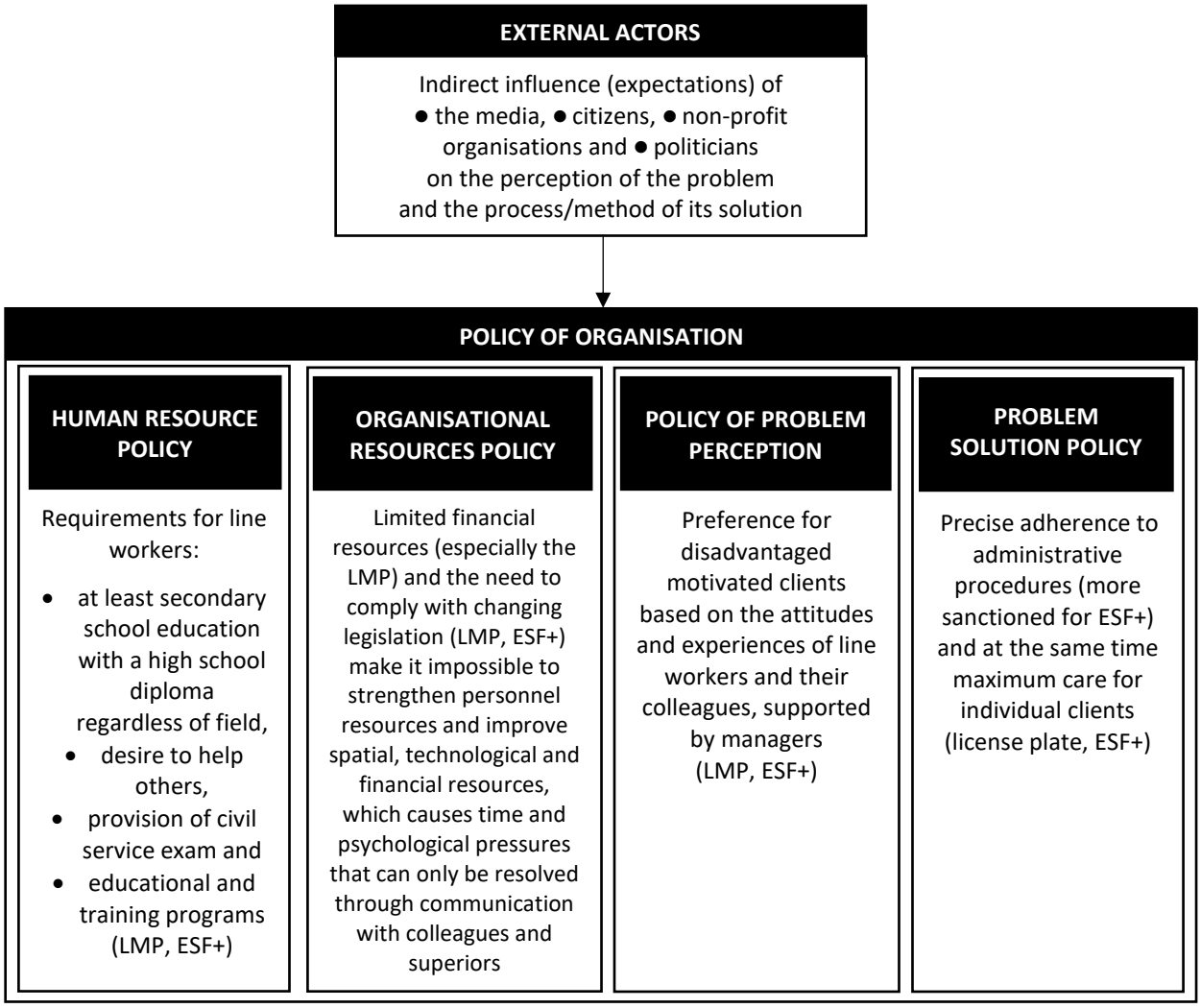
[102] External actors may include, in particular, client interest groups, citizens, the media, politicians, professional groups, and scientists/researchers.

- ***The "Organisational resources policy"*** *is inconsistent between the workplaces studied in both locations. As a result of lower financial resources allocated to workplaces implementing state employment policy compared to those implementing a European project, this workplace is characterised by under-dimensioning of almost all monitored resources.* This is manifested explicitly in: (i) a small number of workers compared to the number of clients, (ii) limited time for dealing with clients, (iii) a large number of frequently changing rules requiring frequent training, and (iv) of workers in the workplace preventing anonymous dealings with clients, (v) outdated technological and information resources causing time delays and (vi) lower wages and thus the likelihood of higher employee turnover;
- ***The "Policy of problem perception"*** *by line workers in both types of workplaces and locations is formulated exclusively by the attitudes and experiences of these workers and their colleagues. Their superior line managers simultaneously support it*. Although the vast majority of workers seek to treat all clients equally, they prefer to provide support and assistance, especially to groups of clients they know are unjustly disadvantaged in the labour market, and they are also motivated to address their unemployment-related problems during individual interviews actively. This preference is fully supported by the ***"Problem solution policy"****, which is regulated by line managers and senior managers who use methods and ways of managing, coordinating and controlling line workers* that (i) require workers to accurately perform all prescribed administrative tasks and thus use bureaucratic procedures and, in the case of European project workers, also to achieve prescribed performance indicators and thus use managerial procedures and (ii) at the same time support them in being able to devote maximum care to individual clients and thus use professional behaviour within existing organisational capacities, which is particularly difficult for workers implementing state employment policy, who are faced with limitations in personnel, space, time and technical-information resources.

Line managers, who are aware of the psychological and time-consuming nature of line workers' work, also serve as a "protective buffer" for them, especially against the pressure from requirements imposed by central authorities of the Public Employment Services. This is primarily the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the General Directorate of LOoCR,

which prioritise serving more clients over service quality and thus require line workers to devote maximum care to a group of unmotivated clients who are only recipients of benefits. It follows from the above that ***the current policy setting for solving individual client problems actually supports the bureau-professional behaviour of line workers from LMP workplaces and the bureau-professional-managerial behaviour of line workers from workplaces implementing a European project. The reluctance of workers from LMP workplaces to provide optimal care to unmotivated clients who do not want services leads them to adopt more bureaucratic procedures when working with these clients.***

Figure 6.6 The policy of the local implementing organisations investigated, including sub-policies affecting the recruitment and capacity building of line workers, the resources available to them, the way they view and solve the problem, and the areas influenced by external actors



Note: LMP = labour market policy, ESF+ = European Social Fund
Source: author based on the analysed data

6.1.7 Final Summary of Key Findings

The following Figure 6.7 shows the "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers", which includes the findings we have obtained from the analysis of the implementation of labour market policy in selected regions of the Czech Republic, which we presented in Chapter 5 and in the previous part of the text of this chapter. This model captures the goals achieved by line workers at selected labour offices we interviewed in providing services to various categories of unemployed persons, as well as the factors that influence the process and the methods used to implement this policy. Knowledge of these factors and the possibility of their regulation, both theoretically and practically, enables control over the implementation of this policy and, consequently, over the methods of providing public services to various client groups, as well as over the resulting impact on regional and social development in the area of employment.

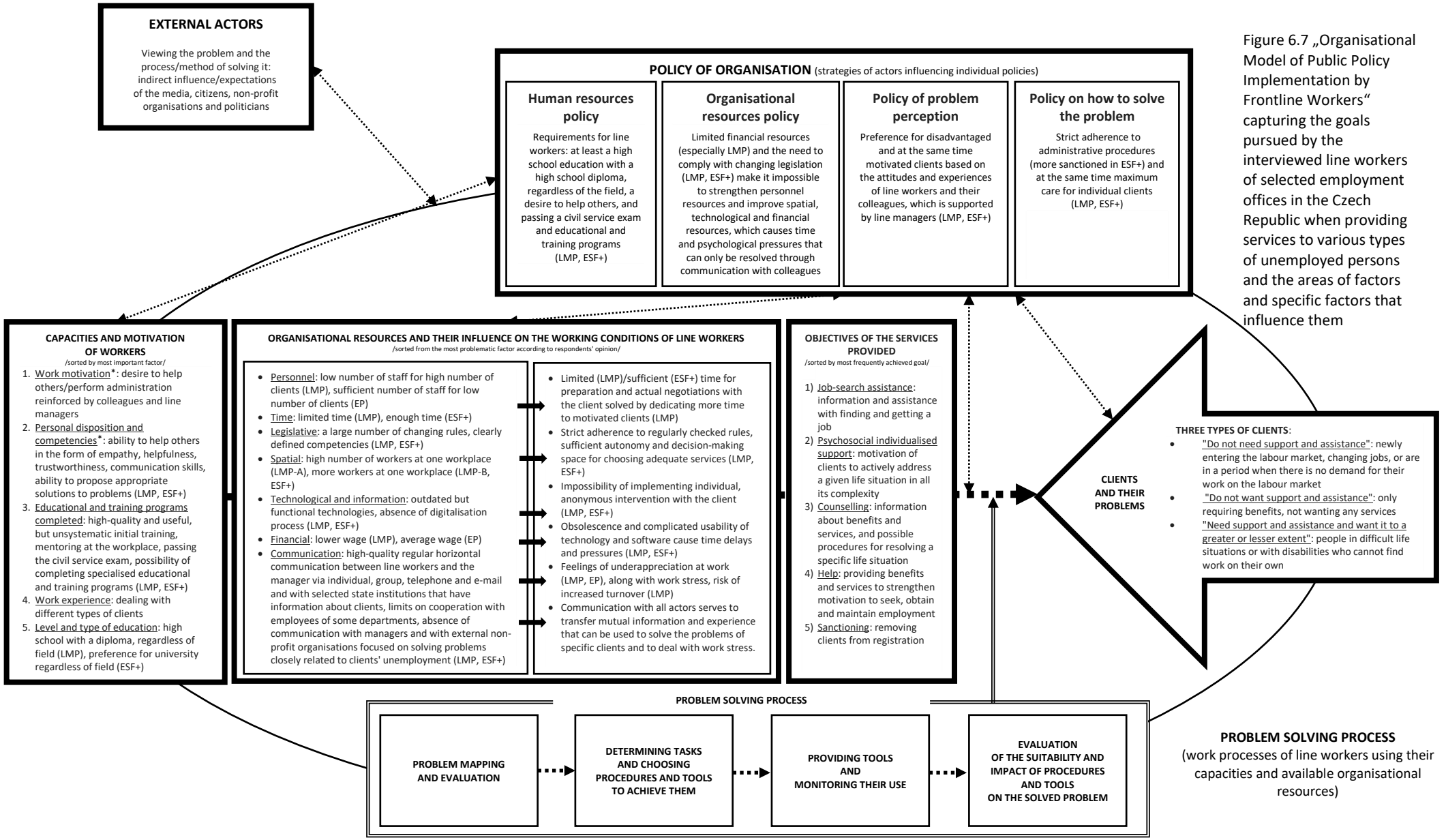


Figure 6.7 „Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers" capturing the goals pursued by the interviewed line workers of selected employment offices in the Czech Republic when providing services to various types of unemployed persons and the areas of factors and specific factors that influence them

PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS
(work processes of line workers using their capacities and available organisational resources)

6.2 Usability of the Proposed "Organisational Model" for Current and Future Research on Public Policy Implementation at the Street Level

As we have already stated in the Introduction to this work, examining the implementation of public policy from a line/street-level perspective is extremely important, mainly because the public administration system, including implementing organisations, the actors and processes taking place within them, as well as the problems solved by policies and the external environment, are diverse, complex, non-programmable, and therefore the results of these policies are not predictable. These policies have direct or indirect effects on regional and social development. For this reason, in our opinion, ***it is appropriate to examine diverse environments and contexts in which the same policies are implemented, using a single analytical tool*** that would be able to capture the broadest possible complexes of as many adequate factors as possible that influence the implementation process at the line level in the environment of implementing organisations, determine the extent of their influence and at the same time enable mutual comparison. This knowledge can serve not only to understand how identical policies are implemented in different environments. What is important here is ***the ability to identify specific "influencing factors" and, subsequently, the possibilities for regulating them. This enables the implementation of a specific public policy to achieve the desired regional and social development in a given location.***

For this reason, we have developed ***the "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers"***, initially designed for the analysis of labour market policy implementation, which ***can be applied to the analysis of the implementation of any public and social policies***. In some cases it may be desirable to modify the individual phases of the "problem" solution process, i.e. the current distinction into the phases of "problem mapping and evaluation", "determining tasks and choosing procedures and tools to achieve them", "providing tools and monitoring their use" and "evaluation of the suitability and impact of chosen procedures and tools on the solved problem". At the same time, we believe that ***this model can also be used to analyse policies implemented by line workers outside state organisations***. For this reason, in this work, we also use the term "line worker" to refer to "line bureaucrat".

In relation to the persistent problems, expectations, and challenges of implementation research at the line level, which we described in detail in Chapter 1, we believe that the analytical "model" we have created can be beneficial in several ways.

First, it has ***the potential to contribute to solving the persistent problems of implementation research***, which mainly concern (i) the “too many variables problem”, where there is no single cause that influences how a policy is implemented and its consequences because the model should capture all key and identifiable variables and (ii) the “theory/practice relationship”, which concerns the relationship between knowledge and practical actions of implementing actors. The reason is that the use of our model and field-based empirical data should enable understanding of the real implementation process and may lead to the development of new explanatory theories (Goggin et al., 1990; Hupe, 2014; Hill & Hupe, 2021).

Second, ***it belongs among the tools within the stream of "advanced" implementation studies with high analytical potential***, as it allows for comparative perspectives and analyses across policy areas and national borders (Hupe, 2014). In this context, it enables to respond to methodological problems of previous implementation research, highlighted by Hupe (2019d, Figure 1.1c in the Appendix), which concern that (i) line-level bureaucracy research can be comparative if it focuses on a specific public task and at the same time documents how this task is performed in different contexts in relation to the results of performing that public task, (ii) systematic qualitative research, however laborious, can be prompted by the demand for contextualized comparison and can also increase its feasibility, and (iii) as a tool for systematic qualitative research where qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) can be used to identify context-related patterns.

Third, ***it may be beneficial for in-depth research on line bureaucracy*** in the areas highlighted by Brodkin (2015) and which relate in particular to (i) the possibility of a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of organisational behaviour, (ii) the usability of the resulting findings for reflecting on the current practices of line workers and their use for possible changes of working conditions (reforms), and (iii) understanding line organisations as a central element, tool, and agent of the modern democratic state with the possibility of recognizing situations in which they fulfil the role of mediator of policy, politics and processes (for more details, see Chapter 1, subchapter 1.2.1).

In summary, we can state that the analytical "model" we have proposed has, in our opinion, following ***theoretical, methodological, analytical and empirical benefits***: (i) no domestic or foreign authors have yet created such a complex model, (ii) which is open and flexible in nature in that it allows for re-validation and possible inserting of additional variables to its individual areas and sub-areas, (iii) based on findings obtained from its use in practice in empirical research, which can use various methods, primarily qualitative, but also quantitative or mixed, and types of analysis at the micro- and meso-level, ideally comparative, and (iv) which allows for obtaining information and understanding the processes of public policy implementation at the line level within one implementing organisation or between multiple implementing organisations in various social, political and organisational contexts in a given state or between different states.

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ANNEXES

Figure 1.1a General insights on the results of the study of street-level bureaucracy to date

GENERAL INSIGHTS ABOUT STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRACY AS A SCHOLARLY THEME

- **Insight 1.** Over the years, the contemporary 'vectors of differing size directed inward' (Weatherley, 1980: 9) having an effect on street-level practice seem to have multiplied.
  - Three macro developments were identified as highly relevant: 'rule piling', digitalization and cultural individualism (Hupe, 2019a)
- **Insight 2.** In a nested configuration positioned within the study of the policy process and particularly implementation, street-level bureaucracy research has originated from dissatisfaction with simplistic and taken-for-granted assumptions about the behaviour of those who actually deliver policy. As such, a bottom-up bias seems inherent.
  - The most significant justification in research for treating implementation as a separate stage (*The appeal of reification*) and adopting an authoritative stance towards decision-makers (*The control trap*) can be found in the sustained normative attraction of looking at a policy process as a range of subsequent steps needed to reach a desired result on behalf of the common good (*The myth of rational problem-solving*).
- **Insight 3.** Conceptualizing street-level bureaucracy in context means analysing street-level practice as positioned not only in a micro web of horizontal and vertical relationships but also, beyond this, in an institutional environment at large.
  - The Multiple Governance Framework (Hupe and Hill, 2006) or the Trinity of Governing derived from this framework (Hupe, 2013; Hupe, 2019b, for more details see Chapter 2, subchapter 2.1.2) can be used.

Source: Hupe (2019d: 464-66)

Figure 1.1b Lessons about theoretical problems that have emerged from previous research on street-level bureaucracy

LESSONS ABOUT THEORETICAL ISSUES

- **Lesson 4.** Start empirical research by explaining what needs explanation. In particular, it is desirable to distinguish between "discretion-as-used" and "discretion-as-granted" (Hupe, 2013).
- **Lesson 5.** Institutional context matters (see e.g., Rice, 2012, 2019).
- **Lesson 6.** Researchers should be attentive to the fact that implementation entails various loci for the reproduction of social inequalities (see e.g., Lotta & Pires 2019).
- **Lesson 7.** National styles and other country-specific features have an influence on the state/ citizen encounter (see e.g., Møller, 2019).
- **Lesson 8.** As fellow citizens, street-level bureaucrats mirror stereotypes and other biases prevalent in society at large (see e.g., Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2019).
- **Lesson 9.** While using intuition and tacit knowledge, even professionals are only partly aware of why they act the way they do. Drama workshops may enhance their self-reflection (see e.g., Evans, 2019).
- **Lesson 10.** Public-private arrangements and other forms of 'private government' may expose some street-level bureaucrats more than others to market incentives, resulting in greater empirical variation in practised accountabilities (see e.g., Klenk & Cohen, 2019).
- **Lesson 11.** While fully automated rule application continues to be a rationalist fiction, e-government may expose some street-level bureaucrats more than others to digitalization. Apart from office technologies, the effects of social media on street-level practice thus far have remained understudied (see, e.g., Hoybye-Mortensen (2019).
- **Lesson 12.** Street-level supervisors are, like the street-level bureaucrats they are supervising, policy co-makers in their own right, using their multi-dimensional discretion in empirically varying ways (see e.g., Hupe & Keiser, 2019).
- **Lesson 13.** Professionalism is an important institution affecting street-level work (see e.g., Harrits, 2019).
- **Lesson 14.** Some institutional contexts may enhance an 'entrepreneurial' role of street-level bureaucrats, in which they actively seek to influence policy design (see e.g., Cohen & Klenk, 2019).
- **Lesson 15.** Street-level bureaucrats have to respond to a variety of accountability forums, turning formal accountability towards political authorities and senior administrators empirically into an important but only one driver towards appropriate agency (see e.g., Lieberherr & Thomann, 2019).
- **Lesson 16.** Within country-specific contexts, reforms of public administration influence street-level work in ways thus far understudied. Particularly local government and administration are to be taken into account (see e.g., Kuhlmann, 2019).
- **Lesson 17.** When what happens at the street level of government bureaucracy is placed within 'the bigger picture' of its institutional environment, the relevance of theoretical approaches can be put in perspective, while statements about the relative weight of the elements concerned can be made (see e.g., Hupe, 2019c).

Source: Hupe (2019d: 466-74)

Figure 1.1c Lessons about methodological issues that have emerged from previous research on street-level bureaucracy

LESSONS ABOUT METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES
• **Lessons 18.** Street-level bureaucracy research can be made truly comparative when focused on a particular public task, while documenting the ways that task is being fulfilled in different contexts (activities), in relation to the results of that public task fulfilment (performance).
• **Lesson 19.** Mixed-methods designs may be an appropriate way of enhancing street-level bureaucracy research, in the sense that the time and resource-intensive character of such designs invites the formation of multi-disciplinary research teams but also may promote multi-national research cooperation.
• **Lesson 20.** Although not a one-size-fits-all solution, if used in a way well reflected upon, quantitative research can fulfil unique functions, like testing theoretical assumptions, highlighting the direction and strength of causal relationships and enabling international comparisons.
• **Lesson 21.** Systematic qualitative research, labour intensive as it is, may be induced by contextualized comparison, while it may also enhance the feasibility of the latter.
• **Lesson 22.** Micro-level analysis, currently dominant in street-level bureaucracy research, should be complemented with multi-level research designs.
• **Lesson 23.** Researchers take the notion of street-level practice as located in a 'micro web' of relationships (Hupe & Hill, 2007) seriously when they focus on street-level bureaucrats as individuals but also as members of formal or informal teams acting in networks around a particular public task.
• **Lesson 24.** As a tool for systematic qualitative research, Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) can be used to identify context-related patterns.
• **Lesson 25.** As a tool for systematic qualitative research, vignettes can disclose empirical information about street-level practice going beyond the results of a survey.

Source: Hupe (2019d: 475-80)

Figure 1.1d Lessons from other directions that have emerged from previous research on street-level bureaucracy

LESSONS FROM OTHER DIRECTIONS
• **Lesson 26.** Also from beyond street-level bureaucracy as a scholarly theme, relevant knowledge is available, providing complementary and to a large extent converging, insights (see e.g., Byers, 2019) • **Lesson 27.** Dimensions of public ethics should be incorporated in research of what happens at the street level, as an analytical contribution to the identification of 'good street-level bureaucracy' (see e.g., Stensöta, 2019) • **Lesson 28.** Acting on behalf of all of us, street-level bureaucrats are being asked to uphold a plurality of, often conflicting, values. When it comes down to developing a role conception and to situational judgement, street-level bureaucrats may – perhaps most of all – rely on their peers (see Hupe, 2019d)

Source: Hupe (2019d: 480-82)