Lars Tummers

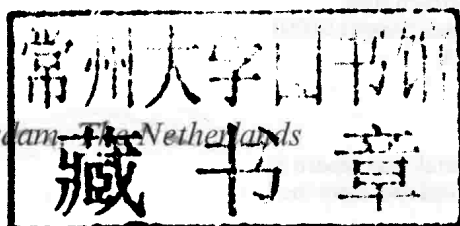**POLICY ALIENATION AND THE POWER OF PROFESSIONALS**

Confronting New Policies

Policy Alienation and the Power of Professionals

Confronting New Policies

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Preface

In 1964, Robert Blauner wrote '*Alienation and Freedom*'. One of the dimensions of alienation he distinguishes is 'meaninglessness'. You can feel meaningless when you do not experience a sense of purpose in your work. According to Blauner, work is more meaningful when you: (1) work on a unique and individual product; (2) work on a larger part of the product; and (3) are responsible for a larger part of the production process. Viewed in this light, writing a book is very meaningful. You work on an unique product. You are responsible for a large part of the production process and the resulting product. In this sense, I can recommend writing a book to you all as very meaningful. You should do it!

On the other hand, I did often question the meaning of writing a book. This journey of writing a book concerning policy alienation started when I became a PhD student at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I wondered what the value of writing such a book is for society. How many people would really benefit from my work? Is something meaningful when it does not have any impact on scholarly thinking or tackle important practical problems that professionals, managers and policymakers have to deal with? Some writers are satisfied when their books are not taken into account. However, I wanted my work to enter the professional literature, and took steps to ensure that this would happen.

The first measure that I took was rewriting my thesis as a book for a more international audience. You are reading the result of this effort (and I hope you enjoy it!). This book focuses on the problems that public professionals experience with the policies they have to implement. Today, professionals from all over the world can have problems with implementing policies. This ranges from Israeli teachers organizing a strike (lasting 64 days!) against school reforms (Berkovich, 2011), via British local civil servants leaving their jobs because of their problems with New Public Management reforms focused on efficiency and stringent spending limits (Conley, 2002), to US health care professionals having difficulty with the constant flow of policy changes in primary care, resulting in tension, conflict and burnout (Nutting et al., 2011). In this book, these problems are described using the new concept of 'policy alienation', defined as a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from a policy that

is implemented by a professional who interacts directly with clients on a regular basis. The concept of alienation is also discussed from a wider perspective. I use examples that are very diverse, such as the painting 'The Old Guitarist' by Pablo Picasso to illustrate the use of alienation by Hegel, the manufacture of iPhones to illustrate the use of the term alienation by Marx, and the problems of police officers who are obliged to reach ticket quotas to illustrate policy alienation. In these ways, I hope to have developed a book that proves valuable for scholars and practitioners all over the world.

A second measure is that I have prepared a short reading guideline, specified for different types of people. This comes next: you can decide which type of person you identify with the most, read the suggested chapters, and maybe be inspired to read more.

For me, my work will become more meaningful as more people take it into account. But alongside this, the most meaningful experience during the writing of this book has been working with scholars, practitioners, clients and others on the interesting subject of policy alienation. Even when writing a book as a single author, I think you 'never write alone'. I am greatly indebted to many people and I would like to mention a few in particular.

Victor Bekkers, Bram Steijn and Sandra van Thiel deserve the first thanks. Victor, your expertise concerning policy processes helped me to develop into a more senior academic in this field. I am glad that we still work together intensively, now maybe more than ever as we coordinate the EU FP7 project on Learning on Innovation in Public Sector Environments (LIPSE). Bram, your knowledge of organizational sociology, and in particular alienation, was invaluable for this book. I admire the fact that you apply your own HRM expertise when working with others. Among else, you reminded me of the dangers of excessive work (*de menselijke maat*). Sandra, I am glad that I got to know you well. Your desire for solid research and quantitative measurement seriously improved this book and helped me to grow as a researcher. Thank you for always being accessible and being involved, both professionally and personally. I wish you all the best in your new role as professor of public management at the Radboud University.

A warm word of thanks also goes to the practitioners who provided me with the much-needed expertise concerning the policies and sectors that I studied. I would like to thank all the respondents I interviewed, those who participated in group discussions or presentations, and those who completed surveys. This totals over 2500 public professionals, including insurance physicians, secondary school teachers, psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists and midwives. Without you, this book would not

Table P.1 Reading outline

Who are you?	What can you read when you are in a hurry?
I am a public manager, policy maker or professional, who has to deal with new governmental policies all the time.	Chapter 1 (Introduction), 8 (conclusion, including guidelines for practice), and Appendix (especially designed for practitioners).
I am a sociologist interested in alienation.	Chapter 1 (Introduction), 2 (background on alienation) and 3 (relationship between the public sector and alienation).
I am interested in change management.	Chapters 6 (influence of policy alienation on resistance to change) and 7 (influence of policy alienation, organizational context and personality context on resistance to change).
I am a public administration scholar interested in public management or policy implementation.	Chapter 1 (Introduction) and Chapter 8 (Conclusion). Hereafter any chapter is suitable!
I am interested in health care.	Chapters 6 (influence of policy alienation on resistance to change, case: midwives) and 7 (influence of policy alienation, organizational context and personality context on resistance to change. Case: mental health care professionals).
I am interested in social security or education.	Chapter 5 (factors influencing policy alienation Cases: insurance physicians and teachers).
I am interested in psychometric scale development.	Chapter 4 (development of measurement instrument for policy alienation).
I am a very busy consultant.	Appendix (shows how you can use the policy alienation framework in practice).
I cannot identify with one of the above.	Feel free to choose which parts of the book suit you most. Chapter 1 gives a short overview.

exist. I hope I have fully accounted for your experiences with governmental policies.

den Dulk, Peter Hupe, Walter Kickert, Niels Karsten, Eva Knies, Ben Kuipers, Rebecca Moody, Michael Musheno, Mirko Noordegraaf, Kim Putters, Brenda Vermeeren, Steven Van de Walle, and Bas de Wit. I would furthermore thank PhD student Bobby Glenn Stuijfzand for his help in editing this book.

My last words of thanks go to my wife, Aline. Aline, I think you suffered the most from the fact that I was writing a book and working as a consultant for PwC at the same time. It was a very intense period for both of us. You prevented me from becoming what you called a 'one-dimensional man'. I admire the way you combine work, family, friends, and me (I know I need a lot of your attention). I learn a lot from you and look forward to spending our lives together. You give meaning to my life. Thank you.

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Lars Tummers
Utrecht, The Netherlands
September 2012

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PART I

Introduction and Background of Policy Alienation

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Introduction and Background of Policy
Alienation

1. Introducing policy alienation and the power of professionals

1.1 INTRODUCING THE INTRODUCTION

Currently, there is an intense debate concerning professionals in the public sector (Ackroyd et al., 2007; Currie et al., 2009; Emery and Gianque, 2003; Hebson et al., 2003). Authors such as Duyvendak et al. (2006) and Freidson (2001) note that many of the pressures that professionals face are related to the difficulties they have with the policies they have to implement. For example, Bottery (1998:40), examining the pressures on professionals stemming from new policies in education and health care in Great Britain, cites a teacher arguing that:

> The changes have been outrageous, and have produced a culture of meritocracy and high flyers. There's massive paperwork because the politicians don't believe teachers are to be trusted.

A second example refers to the introduction of a new reimbursement policy (known as Diagnosis Related Groups, DRGs) in Dutch, mental health care. The system of DRGs was developed as a means to determine the level of financial exchange for mental health care provision. This was part of a process to convert the Dutch health care system into one based on a regulated market. The DRG policy differs significantly from the former method, in which each medical action resulted in a financial claim. The old system meant that the more sessions a professional caregiver had with a patient, the more recompense could be claimed. This was considered by some to be very inefficient (Kimberly et al., 2009).

The DRG policy changed the situation by stipulating a standard rate for each disorder, such as a mild depression. This meant that the professional was no longer totally free to determine how many hours to treat a patient. This was bound to certain upper and lower bounds (such as between 250 and 800 minutes for treating a mild depression). This was a major change, which was not welcomed by many professional caregivers. In one large-scale survey, nine out of ten professionals wanted this policy abandoned, and some openly demonstrated against it (Palm et al., 2008).

The following quotations from health care professionals are illustrative (see also Chapter 7):

> Within the new health care system economic values are dominant. Too little attention is being paid to the content: professionals helping patients. The result is that professionals become more aware of the costs and revenues of their behavior. This comes at the expense of acting according to professional standards.

And:

> Patients receive a 'label' from a classification system [. . .]. Sometimes a patient fits into a 'depression' but really needs something more than a neat 'Cognitive Behavioral Therapy protocol of ten sessions'. If time and number of sessions rather than content start dominating, it becomes impossible to provide patient-centered care.

These examples are not unique: many public professionals appear to have difficulties identifying with the policies they have to implement (Bottery, 1998; Duyvendak et al., 2006; Freidson, 2001; Furlong et al., 2000; White, 1996). This may be due to various factors. However, what stands out is that, nowadays, many policies focus on efficiency and financial transparency. Public professionals may have difficulty in accepting the changing trade-off in values, which becomes manifest when implementing such a policy program. Here, Emery and Gianque (2003:475) note that 'to focus on only the economic logic of action poses problems for public agents. They have to set aside some other shared values in order to concentrate solely on "measurement management".' These adopted output performance norms often conflict with traditional professional standards and/or with the demands of increasingly empowered clients.

These developments can be seen as an outcome of the influence of New Public Management (NPM) (Hood, 1991; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). NPM can be defined as a broad set of management approaches and techniques, borrowed from the private sector, applied in the public sector (Hood, 1991). In NPM policies, economic values – such as efficiency – are often dominant and can take precedence over values such as equity, security and predictability. As NPM policies have been very widespread (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004), it seems that professionals in various countries and sectors could have difficulties identifying with the policies they have to implement.

Although these identification problems have been acknowledged by scholars in both policy implementation and public management literature streams (Ewalt and Jennings, 2004; May, 2003; Peters and Pierre, 1998), there is to date no coherent, theoretical framework for analyzing this

topic. This book addresses this issue by building a theoretical 'policy alienation' framework, building on the concept of work alienation developed in the field of sociology of work and labor. Policy alienation is defined as a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the policy program to be implemented, by a public professional who interacts directly with clients on a regular basis.

Analyzing policy alienation in public professionals is not only of academic interest, it is also highly relevant for policymakers. First, this is because if implementers are unable to identify with a policy this can negatively influence policy effectiveness and thereby organizational performance (Ewalt and Jennings, 2004; May and Winter, 2009). A vivid example is the introduction of the reform 'The New Horizon' in Israel (based on Berkovich, 2011). This policy intended to extend the school day, mainly by adding teaching hours for small-group tutoring. In return, teachers' salaries would increase. However, one of the unions (The Teachers Union) went on strike at the start of the 2007–2008 school year to protest against this policy. The strike lasted an impressive 64 days, the longest in history in the Israeli education system. During the strike, 550 000 pupils received no education. Second, a high level of policy alienation can also affect the quality of interactions between professionals and citizens, which may eventually influence the output legitimacy of government (Bekkers et al., 2007). A better understanding of policy alienation is important for policymakers and managers if they want to develop policies that will be more readily accepted by implementing public professionals and hence deliver more public value, such as increasing security and economic growth.

This book focuses on this new concept of 'policy alienation'. This introductory chapter first provides a short background concerning the pressures that professionals face in contemporary society, answering the question: What is happing with professionals nowadays? (Section 1.2). Next, it defines the two central concepts of this book: policy alienation and public professionals (Section 1.3). Sector 1.4 discusses the possible value of this book, identifying value in theoretical, methodological and practical terms. Section 1.5 discusses the book's outline and the final section summarizes the chapter and looks ahead to the next one.

1.2 PUBLIC PROFESSIONALS, POWER AND ALIENATION

This book will analyze the experiences of public professionals faced with new policies, thereby using the notion of 'policy alienation'. However, an

important question arises when the alienation of professionals is studied. How is it possible that, nowadays, one can speak of the *alienation of professionals?*[1] In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, professionals were often portrayed as a positive example of non-alienated workers, against the typical alienated industrial worker. They enjoyed autonomy and could use their creativity in work, as opposed to working in a monotonous way on an assembly line, having no freedom to decide what to work on, how to work on it, where to work and sometimes even when to take a break. Related to this, Mottaz (1981) shows that 'perceptions of self-estranging conditions tend to increase from professional to blue-collar jobs, indicating a differential opportunity to exercise self-expression in work'. More specifically, he showed that school teachers experienced the lowest level of self-estrangement (a dimension of work alienation), while factory workers indicated the highest level. Also Podsakoff et al. (1986) showed empirically that professionals (medical doctors, lawyers, engineers and architects) experienced lower alienation than non-professionals (clerks, pharmacy technicians, janitors and road maintenance workers). Hence, most studies on alienation (and ways to reduce it) focused on industrial workers, or compared industrial workers with more professionalized occupations (Blauner, 1964; Blood and Hulin, 1967; Cotgrove, 1972; Kornhauser, 1965; Shepard, 1971). Only a few studies focused exclusively on professionals (for example Miller, 1967). What has happened since, that we are talking nowadays about the alienation of professionals? This section aims to shed light on this question by providing a short background on the changes that professionals in the public sector have faced.

Professionals and professionalism have long been, and still are, important concepts in the public sector. In the first studies on professionals and professionalism, a functionalist perspective was used that originated from the works of Emile Durkheim (1957) (see also Van der Veen, forthcoming 2012). In this perspective, professionals are seen as the bearers of important social values. Professionals, such as medical specialists and notaries are seen as using their skills for the betterment of society. Especially in the 1970s and 1980s, professionals and professionalism became much more controversial. It was said that professionals were over-occupied with their self-interests, which had resulted in empire building and protectionism of their professional status (Duyvendak et al., 2006). A prime example of this assault is Illich's *Medical Nemesis. The Expropriation of Health.* Illich (1976) argues that the power of the medical profession is harmful to society. He starts his essay by noting (1976:3): 'The medical establishment

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[1] I wish to thank Professor Dr Stephen Ackroyd for raising this important point.

has become a major threat to health. The disabling impact of professional control over medicine has reached the proportions of an epidemic'.

However, in the present day, the balance seems to be shifting once again. This is illustrated by the fact that Freidson (2001) – once a leading critic of the power of professions – argues that the power of professions is diminishing to a level that could have serious negative consequences both for professionals and for society (Duyvendak et al., 2006:8). Generally, it seems that an intense debate is ongoing concerning the pressures facing public professionals in service delivery. A number of scholarly articles have appeared on this topic (Ackroyd et al., 2007; Currie et al., 2009; De Ruyter et al., 2008; Noordegraaf, 2007; Sehested, 2002; Thomas and Davies, 2005), several special issues, for example in *Current Sociology* (Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011) and some important books (Bottery, 1998; Duyvendak et al., 2006; Freidson, 2001; Furlong et al., 2000; Noordegraaf and Steijn, forthcoming).

Why is there such an intense debate on these public professionals? Many argue that, in the contemporary public sector, numerous forces contradict the ideals of professionalism, such as changes in the ways in which professionals are managed, the emancipation of clients, and changing political viewpoints (Ackroyd et al., 2007; De Ruyter et al., 2008; Exworthy and Halford, 1998). For instance, it is noted that, as a result of managerial pressures, professions have experienced a reduction in their autonomy and dominance (Evetts, 2003:369; Exworthy and Halford, 1998). Further, as a result of managerial pressures and emancipated clients, professions such as medicine are threatened with deprofessionalization (Harrison and Ahmad, 2000). However, these very same developments increase the demands on other groups, such as social work and nursing, for professionalization with clients and politicians urging evidence-based practice and a highly educated workforce (Noordegraaf, 2007). Overall, it can confidently be concluded that numerous pressures do seem to be strongly affecting public professionals and professional work.

The subject of this book is the *policy* pressures that face public professionals. Many of the pressures on public professionals are related to the policies they have to implement (Duyvendak et al., 2006; Freidson, 2001; Furlong et al., 2000; Leicht and Fennell, 2001). As noted, the rise of New Public Management (NPM) has had profound impacts on professionals working in the public sector (Noordegraaf, 2007). NPM policies focus on business-like values, such as efficiency, transparency and client choice. These values can dominate traditional professional values such as autonomy and equity. Next, an emphasis on the market and the client can erode professional associations, which are used to organize knowledge creation and transfer (Freidson, 2001; Roberts, 2006). This challenges the