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IMPLEMENTATION REGIMES AND STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRATS:

EMPLOYMENT SERVICE DELIVERY IN DENMARK

RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND INTEGRATION

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Implementation Regimes and Street-Level Bureaucrats:
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Abstract

A natural experiment in the implementation of Danish employment policy provides the basis for examining differences between central and local governmental provision of services. Since 2003 national employment policy for unemployed persons has been implemented through both the national Public Employment Service (central government provision) and through relatively autonomous municipalities (local government provision). Our research is based on nationwide surveys of caseworkers from these entities. Greater ownership of national policy reform and direct lines of authority within central-government regimes foster greater policy commitment, attention to rules, and adherence among frontline workers than is the case for a local-government implementation regime. These lead to actions of street-level bureaucrats in central-government regimes that are more in line with national policies than those of frontline workers in local governments, although these differences on average are not large.

Implementation Regimes and Street-Level Bureaucrats:
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The choice of intermediaries that are charged with policy implementation and how they share responsibilities constitute key aspects of the implementation regime for a given policy. The choice of a structure is rarely a simple matter of naming a governmental organization to carry out a policy. More basic decisions concerning the levels of government and the sharing of responsibilities are central considerations for service delivery in multi-tiered governmental systems. Hall and O'Toole (2000) show that as early as the mid-1960s the preferred implementation structure for American national policies was multi-actor structures spanning governments, sectors, and agencies. Given these complexities, development of an understanding of the degree of success in implementing policies requires consideration of how these design choices shape the actions of managers and street-level bureaucrats who carry out policies.

Much of the scholarly attention to this translation has focused in recent years on networks of service agencies (e.g., Goldsmith and Eggars 2004, McGuire 2006, Milward and Provan 2000) and particularly on contractual arrangements among public and private providers of services (e.g., Brown, Potoski, Van Slyke 2006, Hodge and Greve 2007). However, as Charles Wise (1990) notes public-private partnerships are only one avenue for service delivery. Given the current fascination with non-governmental service provision, alternatives that entail different forms of governmental provision of services have received little attention in the scholarly literature in recent years. One exception is the discussion by Christopher Leman of direct governmental provision of services for which he argues ‘many direct government activities have been and continue to be more successful than those carried out indirectly’ (2002: 49).

Many services in multi-tiered governmental systems are either provided directly or via an intergovernmental system. Public organizations are central to both of these regimes for service delivery. But, not all public organizations are the same nor necessarily embrace their service-delivery roles with equal vigor. These differences provide a foundation for considering basic differences in central versus local *governmental provision* of services, which we label as different implementation regimes. We seek to understand how differences in these regimes affect policy implementation. We pay particular attention to differences between regimes in the actions of street-level bureaucrats who are on the frontlines of governmental service delivery.

We are able to take advantage of a natural experiment in the delivery of employment services in Denmark. Since 2003 national employment policy for unemployed persons has been implemented through both the Public Employment Service (PES) as a branch of national

government and through relatively autonomous municipalities. The former is a central-government provider of services while the latter is part of a local-government implementation regime. Though the specifics of some employment functions differ, both regimes seek to implement a national policy reform enacted in 2002, 'Putting More People into Work,' that shifts the emphasis of employment programs from providing skills acquisition and financial support to an emphasis on getting people into jobs more quickly.

We show that the direct provision of services via the central-government provider (PES) has on average a 10 percent higher rating of perceived outcomes for getting people into jobs than for municipal service delivery. We attribute this differential outcome, among other factors, to differences in the degree to which caseworkers in the two regimes emphasize getting clients into jobs. Given that many caseworkers do not agree with the national policy reform, there is variability in this emphasis. It turns out that similar forces are at play in each regime in explaining this variability. We highlight the degree to which caseworkers and their managers embrace the policy objectives (their commitment) along with the extent of the attention to rules of caseworkers. In short, we trace the apparent differences in performance of implementation regimes to differences in policy commitment (endorsement) and attention to rules. For this case, both are stronger under the central-government provision of services.

We unpack this in what follows first by setting for the conceptual foundations for considering different implementation regimes and hypotheses about the role of various policy design and organizational considerations in affecting service delivery under these regimes. We then discuss the setting for the research, our data, and the measures we employ. This is followed by our findings in examining a chain of influences on policy implementation. We conclude with observations about studying governmental service delivery.

Conceptual Issues

This research is concerned with central versus local governmental provision of services. Our research foci are the ways that these different modes of delivery affect policy implementation. In considering this it is useful to frame the discussion as a consideration of different implementation regimes. Robert Stoker (1991: 55) defines an implementation regime as 'an arrangement among implementation participants that identifies the values to be served during the implementation process and provides an organizational framework to promote those values.' Key components of any regime are the organizations that serve as policy delivery intermediaries and the personnel who serve on the front-lines of service delivery (see Winter 1990).

The regime perspective underscores two key points about policy implementation. One is that agreement about policy objectives is not preordained, particularly when different levels of government are involved. Each level has a set of political and bureaucratic forces that shape the actions of intermediary organizations. A second point is that these organizations in turn have a profound influence in shaping policy implementation. They establish priorities and influence what happens at the frontlines of service delivery. Policy success ultimately depends on the degree to which intermediaries and front-line workers embrace higher-level policy objectives.

These notions imply that the forces that are at work in shaping policy implementation are similar regardless of the implementation regime. Each entails intermediary organizations and front-line workers who come to the task with different perspectives, skills, and priorities. What likely differs between regimes is the degree that participants vary in their policy endorsements and the extent to which they pay attention to rules that guide their decisions. Given this, it is useful to consider first the role of intermediaries and front-line workers in policy implementation. This provides the foundation for presenting hypotheses about differences in how implementation regimes affect these.

Considering Intermediaries and Front-Line Workers

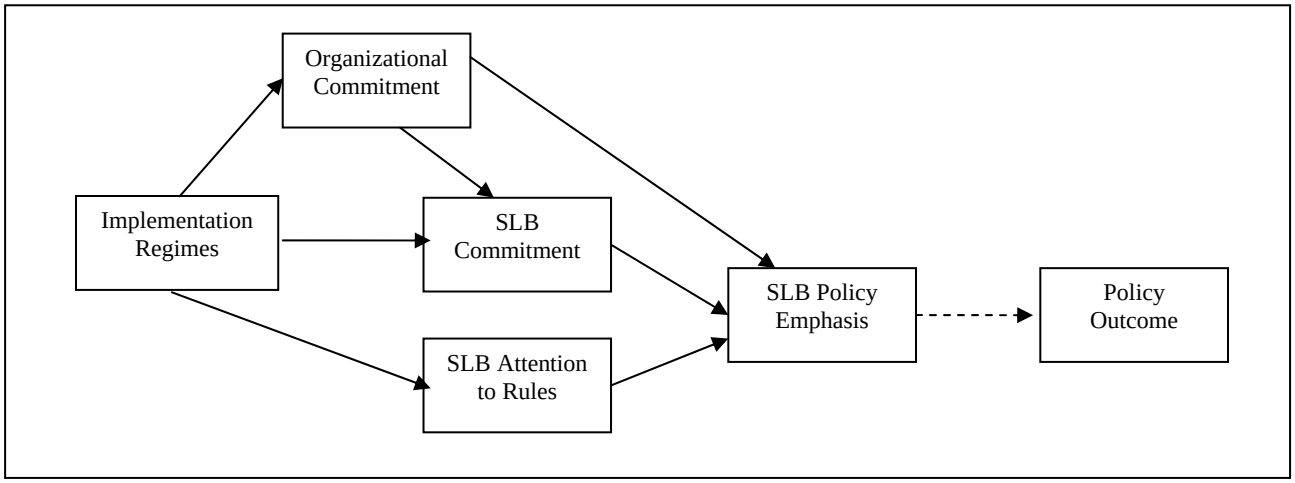
A variety of scholarship concerning policy implementation calls attention to the roles of intermediaries and front-line workers in shaping policy outcomes (see May 2003, Meyers and Vorsanger 2003 for overviews). In generic terms, the implementation process can be viewed as the carrying out of a set of policy objectives at several stages. A variety of considerations enter at each stage in affecting the vigor with which these objectives are implemented. Ultimately, what happens at the front-lines of service delivery shapes policy outcomes.

Figure 1 presents a stylized version of these considerations with particular attention to those elements that are addressed in this research. Our purpose in presenting this is to frame the discussion that follows of differences in governmental implementation regimes. The main focus of our research is what happens at the front lines—the policy emphasis of street-level bureaucrats, as shown to the right of the center of Figure 1. Following Lipsky (1980), their actions in turn are presumed to be important influences on policy outcomes (as shown with the dashed line to the right). The left of the center part of the figure calls attention to key influences on the policy emphases of street-level bureaucrats. One is their commitment to a given policy, which we conceive as the extent to which street-level bureaucrats endorse, or agree with, the policy. This has been shown to be a key influence in studies of service provision (see May and Winter 2007),

especially when the street-level bureaucrats are likely to be inclined to disagree with the policy provisions.

As discussed by May (2003), the commitment of the leaders of intermediaries to higher-level policy objectives (organizational commitment) is key to the fidelity of policy implementation. Studies of state-level child support policies (Keiser and Meier 1996) and land-use regulation (May 1993) underscore the importance of intermediary commitment as especially found in an intergovernmental setting (also see Goggin et al. 1990, Cline 2000).

Figure 1. Unpacking the Implementation Black Box



The degree to which street-level bureaucrats pay attention to rules when making decisions is another consideration. Street-level bureaucrats may implement national policies either because they agree with these policies (commitment), or because they are attentive to national rules in general and feel obliged to follow these without necessarily endorsing them. For Weber (1947) it was a fundamental part of a modern democracy and a *Rechtsstaat* that bureaucrats must feel an obligation to follow rules as part of a rational-legal order no matter if the bureaucrat personally agrees with the rules or not. Though more recent scholarship about the role of rules in bureaucracies has focused on the dysfunctional aspects of organizations that are too rule-bound and inflexible (e.g. Merton 1968, Bozeman 1993), rules are central elements of implementation in that they signal the policy features that are important. In this regard, Heimer (2008: 31) argues that rules allocate attention at the front lines in 'the struggle to control the attention space of organizations and workers.'

As shown at the far left end of Figure 1, implementation regimes are expected to influence commitment at the organizational and street-level bureaucratic levels as well as

influence the attention that street-level bureaucrats pay to rules. We recognize that this depiction is only a partial depiction of implementation processes for which a variety of other variables concerning the dispositions and attitudes of street-level bureaucrats could be included. We seek to isolate the key factors that we hypothesize are affected by implementation regime differences. This adds parsimony to our theorizing and analyses. As such, our goal is not to maximize explanatory power but rather to examine aspects of implementation regimes that have theoretical importance for service delivery.

Considering Regime Differences

The heart of our theorizing and analysis is consideration of the differences between implementation regimes with respect to the factors depicted in Figure 1. Our main distinction is between central and local governmental provision of services. The former entails promulgation and implementation of policies through agencies that are part of the central government. The latter entails policies that are promulgated at the central government but implemented by intermediaries at another level; in this case the local governmental level. We posit the same generic implementation processes depicted in Figure 1 operate regardless of the regime. But, the regimes differ in the influence of the various components we consider, and this in turn affects both what happens at the front-lines and ultimately policy outcomes. Let us consider relevant hypotheses about these differences.

H_1 Central-government intermediaries are more committed to policy objectives than local-government intermediaries.

The logic of this is that central-government agencies have greater ownership of policies that are promulgated by central government than is the case for agencies at other levels of government. Not all leaders of potentially relevant central-government agencies would necessarily strongly endorse a given policy, but the literature on bureaucratic delegation suggests that elected officials tend to delegate policy implementation to organizations and individuals that they trust (see Wilson 1989: 262-264). Furthermore, those same agencies are likely to have been involved in the development of the policy given their expertise and the trust that officials have in them. That ownership, as shown by May (1995), is key to intermediary commitment.

H_2 Central-government intermediaries show more attention to rules than local-government intermediaries.

Laws and administrative rules are likely to have a greater importance and legitimacy among central-government staff than is the case for local-government employees because the former are part of the ministerial hierarchy that in most cases has made the policy. An important

aspect of this, noted by Heimer (2009) is the symbolic value of rules that show workers that their functions are important. This symbolism is likely to be stronger for those in agencies that promulgate the rules (central government) than those in agencies (local government) that are asked to follow rules promulgated elsewhere. Furthermore, local-government service provision policies adopted by local politicians compete with national ones for priority and legitimacy thereby at times calling into question the legitimacy of national rules.

H_3 The commitment of street-level bureaucrats within central-government agencies to higher-level policies is greater than that of corresponding workers in agencies in local governments.

This is derived from three sets of considerations (more generally see Tang et al. 1996). One, as shown in Figure 1, is that the more committed managers of central-government agencies are more likely to impress the importance of the higher-level policy objectives upon their subordinates. Second, those subordinates are also likely to feel greater ownership of the policy to the extent that they or their organization have been part of its development. Third, these individuals are more likely to be recruited into the agency because their backgrounds and perspectives are more compatible with overall agency goals.

H_4 The influences of greater organizational commitment, attention to rules, and front-line policy commitment lead to stronger policy emphasis of higher-level goals for central rather than local government provision of public services.

This hypothesis is the playing out of the forces depicted in Figure 1. The important point about this hypothesis is that it suggests that apparent differences in the efficacy of central versus local governmental policy regimes are attributable to the differences in the component influences rather than the regime itself. If true, we expect to find observed differences in policy emphasis by street-level bureaucrats in the two regimes to be substantially reduced or eliminated once the differences in the factors for this hypothesis are taken into account. In principle, one could imagine a local-government implementation regime that places greater emphasis on each of these considerations. But, for the reasons stated above we think the central-government implementation regime has greater purchase on them.

While our focus is on actions of street-level bureaucrats rather than policy outcomes per se, it is useful to note that we do expect there to be systematic differences in outcomes, either as perceived or actual ones, between the two implementation regimes. We expect under central-government service provision to find outcomes that better achieve national policy objectives. This expectation is in effect a restatement of hypothesis 4, given the central role of street-level bureaucrats in affecting outcomes.

The Setting

The context of this study is the actions of caseworkers in the implementation of employment policy in municipalities and the central-government Public Employment Service (PES) in Denmark. A visible national employment reform of 2002, 'Putting More People into Work,' sets the policy context for this research. According to the general remarks of the bill introducing the reform: 'The two main objectives of changing the employment policy are a better and worthier effort towards unemployed people taking departure from the situation of the individual person and an effort that is targeted towards the fastest and most direct way to normal jobs—and to achieve the objective of getting more people into employment.' A central aspect of this reform is changing the way that employment policy is implemented at the local level.

Table 1 summarizes the distinctions between the central and local governmental implementation regimes that are the heart of our analysis. Danish municipalities and the central-governmental PES are both on the frontlines in the delivery of employment services. They deliver employment services to unemployed persons for whom the PES addresses persons who are eligible for unemployment insurance and municipalities address persons who are not. The PES have more clients that are available for work than municipalities, and even among those clients who are available for work on average PES clients have a better fit with the labor market than municipal clients. Local PES offices typically cover a larger geographical catchment area than municipalities. Local PES organizations are typically larger than municipal staffs, who are serving clients that are available for work, and PES caseworkers have larger caseloads than municipal caseworkers.

The PES is a central-government organization under the Ministry of Employment. At the central level the PES is directed by the National Labor Market Authority in the ministry. At the regional level the PES is headed by a Regional Directing Manager. He is assisted by a Regional Labor Market Board with representatives from employers' associations, the unions, municipalities and counties. The 'corporatist' board has authority over the regional allocation of funds for various employment promoting programs and has advisory functions concerning organizational and personnel. At the local level 44 middle managers are overseeing 77 local offices with caseworkers.

The main municipal tasks are checking eligibility for and paying social assistance, giving advice on job search and career and vocational guidance, checking availability for work, and placing unemployed clients into jobs or employment promoting programs. Part of the municipal costs for employment services are reimbursed by the central government. Municipalities offer

Table 1. Comparison of Implementation Regimes

	Implementation Regime	
	Central Government	**Local Government**
Regulating ministry	Ministry of Employment	Ministry of Employment
Organizational Provider	Public Employment Service	Municipalities
Highest hierarchical authority	Ministry of Employment	Municipal elected officials
Clientele	Unemployed people eligible for unemployment insurance	Unemployed people not eligible for unemployment insurance
Functions	Contact course conversations Placing clients into employment enhancing programs	Contact course conversations Placing clients into employment enhancing programs Determining eligibility for and paying social assistance benefits
Number of clients at end of 2006 (approximately)[a]	112,100	29,800
Mean client distance from maximum labor market fit (scale 1-3) [b]	1.6	2.4
Number of regional authorities	14	-
Number of local authorities/managers	44	268
Number of local offices	77	280
Mean number of caseworkers (full-time equivalents) per local manager [c]	12.9	5.3
Mean client-load per caseworker [d]	74	62

Notes:

[a] Ministry of Employment statistics: www.jobindsats.dk

[b] Scale of client match with labour market: 1 (perfect match), 2 (good match), 3 (acceptable) match) based on middle manager survey. If no match, clients are treated differently.

[c] Manager survey collected nation widely among middle managers of the two organizations in 2006.

[d] Caseworker survey, see our description of the data.

services for unemployed clients who have been found to be available for work as well as clients who have not. Only services for the former clients are comparable to those of the PES.

Municipal employment services are headed by elected municipal councilors while the daily work is typically performed within a department of social affairs and employment. The municipal councilors exert their political influence over employment services through their membership on a municipal Committee for Social Affairs and Employment that has direct supervision of employment services. A CEO of Social Affairs and Employment Services typically attend the meetings of the committee, supports its chairman and manages the administration. The relevant employment functions for our study are typically overseen by a middle-manager who is responsible for employment services. The organization of these services is fairly consistent across municipalities for which municipal caseworkers are at the frontlines of implementing the national policy reforms. Danish municipalities are autonomous within the boundaries of law and administrative rules issued by the Ministry of Employment. They collect their own taxes but do also receive block grants and matching grants for social and employment services from the central government.

PES and municipal caseworkers must conduct repeated contact-course conversations with clients who are available for jobs. These conversations focus on clients' job-search, career-guidance, placement of clients into employment-training programs, and testing their availability for work. Given that these functions are delegated by most employment service agencies to caseworkers, the actions that they take should in principle be based on decisions within the PES and municipal employment services agency respectively about agency goals. The national policy reform, which is common for the PES and municipal employment services, places a strong focus on caseworkers urging clients to quickly find a job, invoking employment-training measures that promote employment prospects, and testing that clients are available for work. The fact that both central and local governments have parallel responsibilities for implementing a common national policy reform for similar target groups – unemployed persons who have been found to be available for work – gives us a unique option for comparing the delivery of parallel services in the two different implementation regimes.

While we are only comparing parallel functions, it should be kept in mind that municipalities have some additional functions that the PES does not. As mentioned above, municipalities also serve unemployed persons that have not been found to be available for work. For both available and non-available clients municipalities pay income support (social assistance) and determine eligibility for services, including determining whether clients are ready for work. This involves sanctions if clients who have been found to be available for work do not

demonstrate that they ready for jobs by searching for jobs or participate in employment-training programs.

The PES does not have these functions, which for their clients are handled by special semi-private unemployment funds that are related to the unions. If PES caseworkers find indications that some clients may not live up to availability and activity requirements, they must report such incidents to the unemployment funds that make the final decision. Most municipal caseworkers have professional training in social work while the PES caseworkers are more evenly distributed among various trainings.

Data, Measures, and Methodology

Data

Two parallel primary data sources are used in the analyses that follow. These are nation-wide surveys of samples of PES and municipal caseworkers who are responsible for implementing the laws and intentions of the reform. Their responses form the basis for characterizing the actions they emphasize when working with clients along with various attitudinal considerations and contextual factors.

The survey of municipal caseworkers yielded 389 respondents with an overall response rate of 88 percent of those who were sampled. These respondents were selected by the municipal middle managers, who we had identified by telephone calls to all municipalities, according to specified selection criteria that require caseworker respondents to have at least three months experience with individual contact-course conversations with clients that are available for work. An internet-based survey was collected from early May until the end of June 2006. Two email reminders and a third telephone follow-up reminder were sent to increase participation. The caseworkers that responded are from 190 of the 269 Danish municipalities, thereby providing representation of 71 percent of the municipalities. Municipalities with less than 10,000 inhabitants and few employment services clients are slightly underrepresented among the survey respondents making up 42.3 percent of our sample compared to 47.4 percent of all municipalities. This under-representation of municipalities is counteracted by the fact that our selection criteria of caseworkers provided an over-representation of those from small municipalities.

The survey of PES caseworkers yielded 201 respondents with an overall response rate of 93 percent of those who were sampled. These were identified by the regional and local management. With support from the National Labor Market Authority in the Ministry of Employment we asked the regional directing managers to identify a total of 229 caseworkers divided by region according to its relative share of the total number of caseworkers in the PES in

Denmark. The relative regional share of the sample was based on information from the Labor Market Agency. We asked that caseworkers in the regional samples should have at least 3 months' experience with contact course conversations and reflect the local distribution of caseworkers and division of work among them. The internet survey was administered in October to December 2006. Two email reminders and a third telephone follow-up reminder were sent to increase participation. The respondents are representative in terms of population size and regional distribution of caseworkers the largest difference being 3 percentage points.

Concepts and Measures

Table 2 provides an overview of the concepts and measures that we employ. The latter are explained in more detail in the methodological appendix. These specify the key concepts shown earlier in Figure 1. The key dependent variable of interest, *policy emphasis*, is what caseworkers emphasize when working with clients. If caseworkers' emphases varied for clients with a stronger or weaker fit with the labor market, we asked the respondent to think of his behaviors towards clients from the medium group of clients that are available for work, i.e. clients with a 'good match' with the labor market, cf. Table 1 above. In this way we sought to standardize the target group for the casework. The index is based on respondents' rating of the degree of emphasis they give to getting such clients into jobs quickly and making demands that clients seek work and participate in employment-training measures. Higher scores indicate policy emphases that are in line with the national employment reform goals. As such, the index indicates how caseworkers carry out policies they are being asked to implement. Although the index has a lower reliability than ideal (Cronbach alpha of .60), deletion of any one or combination of index items resulted in lower reliability.

We also consider *perceived employment outcomes* as a check on the relevance of the policy emphases of street-level bureaucrats. This is based on caseworkers' ratings of the extent to which positive results (on a scale of 1, none, to 10, very extensive) have been achieved in the past year with respect to clients actively seeking jobs, being ready for jobs, and actually obtaining jobs (Cronbach alpha of .86). A key caveat to this discussion is that our outcome measures are perceived rather than actual outcomes. Data on the latter are not available for the timeframe we consider.

The remaining entries in Table 2 are the organizational and dispositional explanatory variables for explaining variation in the policy priorities of street-level bureaucrats. The *commitment of street-level bureaucrats* is a self-rating by caseworkers of the extent to which they endorse the national employment reform, based on their ratings of the degree to which the reform

is a step in the right direction and better for most clients (Cronbach alpha of .89). Higher scores indicate stronger commitment to the reform. *Organizational commitment* is based on caseworkers' ratings of the degree to which their managers support the employment act reform with higher scores indicating stronger support. The degree of *attentiveness to rules of street-level bureaucrats* is based on a rating by caseworkers of the degree to which they pay attention to laws and rules when making decisions about clients. Higher scores scores indicate greater degrees of attention to rules.

Given the difference in clientele served by the PES and municipalities, it is important to consider *client mix*. We measure this as the mean degree of fit with the labor market of each caseworker's clients on a scale from 1 (perfect fit) to 3 (acceptable fit) based on caseworkers' reports of the distribution of their clients according to a classification scheme for assessing clients' availability for work that is common for the PES and municipalities.

Table 2. Key Concepts

Policy Implementation by Caseworkers

- *Policy Emphasis*—The extent to which caseworkers take actions that are consistent with national goals of emphasizing jobs, getting clients into jobs quickly, and making demands on clients.

Perceived Outcomes

- *Perceived Outcomes*—The extent to which caseworkers perceive that their actions are getting clients into jobs and making them look for jobs and being available

Commitment

- *SLB Commitment*—Caseworker ratings of the extent to which they positively evaluate the goals of the national employment reform act.
- *Organizational Commitment*—Caseworker ratings of the extent to which they perceive that their manager supports the goals of the national employment reform act.

Attention to Rules

- *SLB Attention to Rules*—the extent to which caseworkers attend to rules when making decisions in daily work

Contextual Factor

- *Client Mix*—Caseworker-specific measure of the extent to which clients are more difficult to place among clients that are available for work. In addition to this measure of client mix we also attempted to include administrative capacity as a contextual control variable. It was measured as the number of clients per caseworker based on a standard unit of 37 working hours per week. Because administrative capacity was significantly related to neither commitment, rule attentiveness, nor policy priorities and perceived outcomes we decided to omit the variable from the analyses in order to present more parsimonious models.

Methodology

Our examination of the role of implementation regimes in affecting behaviors at the street-level and perceived outcomes are elaborated through a set of analyses. We start by empirically describing the difference between the two implementation regimes with respect to the variables we consider in later analyses. This shows the basic differences in regimes. We then examine variation in different components of the implementation process with attention to our hypotheses using a series of regression analyses.

We theorize that implementation regimes affect outputs and outcomes through their influence on commitment and the degree to which those at the front lines pay attention to rules. This leads us to consider the role of implementation regimes and organizational commitment in explaining variation in caseworkers' commitment and their perceptions of attention to rules when controlling for variation in client composition. We follow by analyzing the roles of regimes, organizational commitment, caseworkers' commitment and attention to rules in affecting caseworkers' policy emphases. If we are correct about the causal mechanisms of regime effects, introducing the explanatory variables of organizational commitment, caseworkers' commitment, and attention to rules should decrease the independent role of regimes. Finally, we examine the roles of regimes and caseworkers' policy emphases in affecting the perceived outcomes of their operations.

Because we used nested data – caseworkers in organizations – the use of simple ordinary least square regressions might render biased estimates of significance due to intra-class correlation. In order to correct for any such bias, we employ OLS with cluster robust standard errors using the Stata statistical package. The relevant clusters are the organizational membership of caseworkers that constitute different municipalities and one or more PES offices under each manager.

Findings

A relevant starting point is to consider differences in regimes. We depict these in Table 3 in comparing mean scores on key indicators for central and local government provision of employment services. These findings show that caseworkers in the central government deliver employment services on average with a stronger policy emphasis in terms of a firm focus on getting clients quickly into jobs than is the case for caseworkers in the local government. Stated differently, central-government caseworkers' implementation behaviors are more in line with the national policy reform objective than those of caseworkers in the local government. However,

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Implementation Regimes

	Central Government [a]	Local Government[b]	Difference [c]	P-value [d]
Dependent variables				
Perceived Outcomes	7.50 (1.36)	6.81 (1.83)	0.68	.00
SLB Policy Emphases	3.79 (0.71)	3.70 (0.68)	0.09	.06
Explanatory variables				
SLB Commitment	3.89 (0.81)	3.53 (0.92)	0.36	.00
Organizational Commitment	4.17 (0.90)	3.84 (0.94)	0.33	.00
SLB Attention to Rules	4.39 (0.80)	4.25 (0.75)	0.14	.02
Controls				
Client Mix	1.53 (0.34)	2.41 (0.38)	-0.88	.00

Notes:

[a] Mean value for the Public Employment Service with number of cases in parentheses. Perceived outcomes are on a scale of 1 to 10; SLB Policy Emphases and the explanatory variables are on a scale of 1 to 5; client mix is on a scale of 1 to 3.

[b] Mean value for municipalities with number of cases in parentheses. Items use the same scales as for the PES.

[c] Mean difference between PES and municipalities.

[d] P-value for independent sample t-test of difference with one-tailed significance levels..

the difference is not great as central-government street-level bureaucrats' policy emphasis is only about two percent above the mean of local-government workers. But, the central-government implementation regime has a larger percentage of high-performing caseworkers. Thirty-three percent of central-governmental caseworks have a policy emphasis score above 4, compared to only 23 percent among municipal caseworkers having corresponding scores. Caseworkers in the central government also perceive about 10 percent better employment outcomes on average in terms of clients searching for and getting jobs as well as being ready for the labor market. Again, the central-government implementation regime has more high-performing caseworkers with 85 percent having a perceived outcome score above 6 compared to 68 percent among municipal caseworkers. These findings support our hypotheses that central-governmental service provision yields better implementation outputs and (perceived) outcomes than local-governmental provision. But, it is important to keep in mind that the magnitude of the differences is not substantial. Caseworkers in both settings on average tend to emphasize actions in accord with the national policy.

The findings also show greater organizational commitment, caseworker commitment, and attention to rules for the caseworkers in the central government than for municipalities. These findings also support our hypotheses that the central-governmental implementation regime fosters greater organizational commitment (H1), and more attention to rules (H2), as well as commitment of frontline workers (H3). These are, of course, zero-order comparisons for which we also need to consider differences in clientele served under the two regimes. As shown at the bottom of Table 3, local governmental caseworkers have on average a greater number of clients who are harder to employ than the central-government caseworkers.

Street-Level Bureaucratic Commitment

Our theorizing suggests that the commitment of street-level bureaucrats to carrying out a given policy is an important factor in shaping their policy actions. We theorize that this commitment is in turn affected by regime differences in the commitment of the organization in which they work to the policy goals. As shown in Tabel 4, we model variation in the commitment as a function of regime, organizational commitment, and variation in client mixes.

These findings help unpack the role of regime and other factors in influencing commitment at the front lines. As shown in Table 4, the commitment of organizational leaders has a positive influence on commitment at the frontlines. We note above that the commitment of street-level bureaucrats is higher for the central-government regime.

When controlling for organizational commitment, the regime effect on the commitment of street-level bureaucrats found in the observed, zero-order regime differences is no longer statistically significant. This implies that the effect of implementation regimes on the commitment of street-level bureaucrats is working through organizational commitment, which is greater in the central-government implementation regime. At the same time, a more difficult client mix does not significantly decrease commitment of street-level bureaucrats to the employment policy reform, implying that the variation in the commitment of street-level bureaucrats is due to differences in organizational commitment and not differences in clienteles.

In separate modelling, which is not shown, we fail to develop a meaningful statistical model of variation in street-level bureaucrats' perceptions of the degree to which they pay attention to rules. In particular, we failed to detect an influence of client mix on attention to rules. This suggests that neither the commitment nor the fidelity of street-level workers to rules are substantially affected by the presence of more difficult to place clients.

Table 4. Explaining Variation in Caseworkers' Commitment

	SLB Commitment
Implementation Regime	
Central Government (vs. Local Government)	0.11 (0.12)
Explanatory Factor	
Organizational Commitment	0.36** (0.05)
Controls	
Client mix	-0.12 (0.10)
Intercept	2.44*** (0.34)
Model Statistics	
Adj. R^2	0.16**
Sample size	531

Notes:

*** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05. * < 0.1 based on one-tailed t-values with cluster robust standard errors, except R^2 for F-test of model fit.

Cell entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with the cluster robust standard errors in parentheses.

The dependent variable is SLB commitment, which is measured as caseworkers' ratings of the extent to which they positively evaluate the goals of the national employment reform act.

Variation in Caseworkers' Policy Priorities

We are particularly interested in the degree to which caseworkers take actions that are consistent with the national policy reform goal of getting people into jobs. We measure this as the policy priorities of caseworkers in emphasizing a set of actions aimed at this goal. We note above that the caseworkers in the central government place greater emphasis on these actions than do municipal caseworkers. At issue is the extent to which these differences are explained by the factors we theorized about in Figure 1.

Table 5 shows two regression models that explain variation in street-level bureaucrats' policy emphases. The use of cluster-robust error estimation methods take into account the clustering of caseworkers within municipalities and local central-government offices. The first regression model examines the effects of organizational commitment, street-level bureaucratic commitment and attention to rules without controlling for differences in client mix. The second regression model adds a control for variation in client mix. As it could be argued that the causes

of caseworkers policy emphases in the two organizations should be analyzed separately, we applied a Chow-test to test whether a pooling of the cases were appropriate. The chow-test was not statistically significant ($p = 0.64$) thereby indicating that it is reasonable to analyze caseworkers from the two organizations together.

Table 5. Explaining Variation in Caseworkers' Policy Emphases

	Model 1	**Model 2**
Implementation Regime		
Central Government (vs. Local Government)	0.03 (0.07)	0.04 (0.13)
Explanatory Factors		
SLB Commitment	0.10*** (0.04)	0.10*** (0.04)
Organizational Commitment	0.08** (0.03)	0.08** (0.04)
SLB Attention to Rules	0.11*** (0.04)	0.11*** (0.04)
Context		
Client Mix		0.06 (0.09)
Intercept	2.58*** (0.23)	2.37*** (0.33)
Model Statistics		
Adj. R^2	0.06***	0.06***
Sample size	563	526

Notes:

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$. * < 0.1 based on one-tailed t-values with cluster robust standard errors, except R^2 for F-test of model fit.

Cell entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with the cluster robust standard errors in parentheses.

The dependent variable is policy emphases, which is measured as the extent to which caseworkers take actions that are consistent with national goals of emphasizing jobs, getting clients into jobs quickly, and making demands on clients.

As shown in both models — and as expected in our fourth hypothesis—caseworkers who are more committed, pay more attention to rules, and work in organizations with more committed managers tend to place a greater emphasis on getting clients into jobs quickly than caseworkers

where these considerations are less strong. The mix of clients, as shown in model 2, does not influence the magnitude of these effects. And, we fail to detect an independent effect of client mix on caseworkers' policy emphases. Other models for which the variable capturing organizational commitment is removed (and not shown in Table 5), yield similar results as those shown here but with stronger effects for caseworkers' commitment. This indicates that part of the influence of street-level bureaucratic commitment is due to the commitment of their organization.

The main finding concerning regime differences is the failure to find an independent effect for the regime type (central government versus local) as shown for the regime variable in the models in Table 5. This means that the other variables in the model account for the observed, zero-order differences in regime type shown in Table 3. Accordingly, the stronger emphasis that caseworkers in the central government place on employment reform goals is a function of their stronger endorsement of the reforms, their managers' stronger support of the reforms, and the greater extent to which caseworkers pay attention to rules in making decisions. It is important to note that while the central government serves a somewhat different clientele than do municipalities, this difference does not account for the observed zero-order differences in caseworkers' policy emphasis for those working in each setting. Adding a control for client mix, shown in model 2, does not change the magnitude of the coefficients of other variables in explaining variation of caseworkers' policy emphases. Nor do we detect a separate effect of client mix on policy emphases.

Variation in Perceived Outcomes

Considering variation in policy emphases would mean little if it did not affect policy outcomes. We attempt to get at this by modelling caseworkers' perceptions of the success in the last year in directing clients toward jobs and in their finding them. We rely on perceived outcomes rather than actual ones because data concerning the latter are not available for the timeframe that we consider. Table 6 reports regression models that explain variation in the perceived policy outcomes. These also take into account the clustering of caseworkers within municipalities and central-government offices. Model 1 examines the effect of regime when controlling for differences in client mix. Models 2 and 3 examine the effect of caseworkers' policy emphasis on the national reform goals of greater job focus with and without controls for client mix.

Table 6. Explaining Variation in Caseworkers' Perceived Outcomes

	OLS Regressions		
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Implementation Regime			
Central Government (vs. Local Government)	0.03 (0.25)	0.64*** (0.15)	-0.03 (0.24)
Explanatory variables			
Policy Emphases		0.36*** (0.11)	0.44*** (0.10)
Context			
Client Mix	-0.74*** (0.23)		-0.76*** (0.22)
Intercept	8.59*** (0.56)	5.47*** (0.42)	7.03*** (0.62)
Model Statistics			
Adj. R^2	0.06***	0.05***	0.08***
Sample size	499	531	497

Notes:

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$. * < 0.1 based on one-tailed t-values with cluster robust standard errors, except R^2 for F-test of model fit.

Cell entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with the cluster robust standard errors in parentheses.

The dependent variable is perceived outcomes, which is measured as the extent to which caseworkers perceive that their actions are getting clients into jobs, making them look for jobs, and being available for work.

Model 1 shows, not surprisingly, that caseworkers who report they deal with a larger mix of more difficult clients to place into jobs also report less success in that regard. This adds face validity to the use of perceived measures of employment service outcomes. We fail to detect an effect of the regime variable when controlling for client mix. This suggests the differences in client mix for caseworkers largely accounts for the observed, zero-order regime differences in perceived outcomes.

The second and third models show the importance of street-level bureaucratic actions for achieving successful (perceived) policy outcomes without and with controls for client mix. As expected, caseworkers with a higher job focus in their policy emphases hold much more positive perceptions of labor market outcomes. Two considerations make this more than a tautological observation. One is that the wording and placement of these questions were very different. The second is that many caseworkers actually question the causal theory of the employment policy

reforms in stressing stronger job focus as means to better employment outcomes. This finding is also useful as it underscores the value of our primary focus on policy outputs—the policy emphases of caseworkers—in studying implementation.

Conclusions

This research addresses central and local *governmental* provision of services. We consider differences between central and local governmental provision of employment services in Denmark. This leads to insights about the underlying forces that contribute to different degrees of success in implementing the Danish policy reform goal of getting people into jobs quickly. Our main foci are the actions of caseworkers at the frontlines of the Public Employment Service (central-government provision) and of municipalities (local-government provision). We theorize about the differences in actions of caseworkers in these two settings as influenced by their policy commitment, their sense of degree to which rules bind their actions, and the commitment of organizations in which they work to the policy reform goals.

Caseworkers who are employed by the Public Employment Service place greater emphasis on average on getting clients into jobs and they perceive stronger job-related outcomes than is the case for those who are employed by municipalities. These findings suggest that the central-government implementation regime has greater implementation success, although the differences on average are not large. But, why is this? Our unpacking of the forces at play shows that the greater job focus is not a result of some intrinsic property of the central-government implementation regime but is a consequence of the stronger commitment of caseworkers to carry out the policy reforms, of their greater attention to rules, and of the stronger organizational commitment to the reforms. We attribute differences in perceived policy outcomes to the greater emphasis that caseworkers who are employed by central government place on finding jobs for clients and a clientele that on average is less difficult to place into jobs.

The finding that similar forces are at work regardless of the regime type is important for implementation theory. We underscore the role of commitment and the degree to which frontline workers pay attention to rules in shaping implementation actions at the frontlines of service delivery. These findings reinforce prior research about commitment of intermediaries (see Mazmanian and Sabatier 1983, Goggin et al. 1990, May 2003) and those at the frontlines (see Brehm and Gates 1997, Meyers and Vorsanger 2003) as well as is consistent with prior research about the importance of attention to rules in guiding implementation behaviors (Reference deleted for review purpose).

The finding that central-governmental provision of services has somewhat greater accord with national policy goals than local-government provision of national policies runs counter to the trend in Denmark for the last 40 years of transferring services from central to local governmental provision. This devolution of services is based on a not well-documented presumption that local-government service provision is more effective than national provision. The findings about the advantages of central governmental provision of services also run counter to the recent trend in Danish implementation regimes for employment policy. Beginning in 2007, after the period of our data collection, central and local-government provision of employment services were merged into joint-functioning job centers located at the municipal level. Furthermore, there is interest within the current government to transfer the responsibility for all employment service functions to municipalities.

We are not claiming that central-government implementation regimes necessarily lead to better implementation outcomes than local-government regimes. The differences we find are not that great on average. Faithful implementation is no guarantee of good outcomes. Local-government service provision may sometimes have competitive advantages, particularly when local governments are allowed autonomy in solving implementation tasks and in taking varying local conditions and preferences into consideration. Much of the degree of success rests—as often is the case in implementation—on the way that potentially reluctant partners are induced to carry out policy reforms (see Cline 2000, Stoker, 1991). This underscores the importance for policy design of building the commitment of key intermediaries and of establishing mechanisms that channel their attention to the desired policy goals (more generally see May 2003). Efforts to devolve services to local policy implementation should place greater emphasis on building a sense of ownership of policy reform and of allowing adaptations that give a stronger sense of control at the local level.

Methodological Appendix

Variables	Mean (s.d)	Measurement
Policy Emphasis	3.73 (.69)	Mean of caseworker rating of their practices towards clients that are available for work on three scales going from 1 (full agreement with first item) to 5 (full agreement with second item). The following scales were used: (1) 'Emphasizing gradual job acquisition' versus 'Emphasizing actual jobs in the conversation with clients'; (2) 'Improving clients' chances for jobs over their work life' versus 'Getting clients into any job quickly;' and (3) 'Taking the clients' problems into consideration' versus 'Making demands on clients'. To keep constant the type of clients that these actions address, respondents were asked to think of the group of clients with the second best fit with the labor market out of 3 groups that all are available for the labor market. Alpha of scale = 0.60. The coding is reversed from the original.
Perceived Outcomes	7.04 (1.72)	Mean of caseworker rating on three scales measuring the results reached for the clients within the last year going from 1 (none) to 10 (very extensive results). The following scales were used: (1) 'Actively seeking jobs' (2) 'Being at the disposal of the labor market' (3) 'Acquired ordinary jobs' Alpha of scale = 0.86.
SLB Commitment	3.65 (.90)	Mean of caseworker rating on two scales of opposing statements about the Employment Reform Act going from 1 (full agreement with first item) to 5 (full agreement with second item). The following scales were used: (1) 'A step in the right direction' versus 'A step in the wrong direction;' (2) 'Better for most clients' versus 'Harmful to most clients' Alpha of scale = 0.89 The coding is reversed from the original.
Managerial Commitment	3.96 (.94)	Caseworker rating of managerial support of the Employment Reform Act on scale going from 1 (Full support) to 5 (No support). The coding is reversed from the original.
Attention to Rules	4.30 (.77)	Caseworker rating of the importance they assign to the law and centrally issued rules when making decisions on scale going from 1 (No emphasis) to 5 (Very much emphasis).
Client Mix	2.18 (.52)	Calculated as the share of caseworker's clients in each of the three groups with the *best* fit with the needs of the labor market weighted by the mismatch of each group (3 being the group with most mismatches). The measure indicates the mean mismatch of the caseworker's clients. Based on caseworkers' reports of percentage of clients in different categories.

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