



AARHUS UNIVERSITY



Coversheet

This is the accepted manuscript (post-print version) of the article.

Contentwise, the post-print version is identical to the final published version, but there may be differences in typography and layout.

How to cite this publication

Please cite the final published version:

Møller, A. M. (2021). Deliberation and Deliberative Organizational Routines in Frontline Decision-Making. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 31(3), 471–488.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muaa060>

Publication metadata

Title: Deliberation and Deliberative Organizational Routines in Frontline Decision-Making
Author(s): Anne Mette Møller
Journal: *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 31(3), 471–488
DOI/Link: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muaa060>
Document version: Accepted manuscript (post-print)

General Rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Deliberation and Deliberative Organizational Routines in Frontline Decision-Making

Anne Mette Møller

Department of Political Science, Aarhus University

Bartholins Allé 7, DK-8000 Aarhus C, Denmark

amm@ps.au.dk

This is the author accepted version of a manuscript published in *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*. Publication date: 22 January 2021.

Please cite as:

Anne Mette Møller, Deliberation and Deliberative Organizational Routines in Frontline Decision-Making, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 2021; muaa060,

<https://academic.oup.com/jpart/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/jpart/muaa060/6054978>

Abstract

Deliberation is a widely recognized but understudied aspect of frontline decision-making. This study contributes to theory development by exploring deliberative practices in frontline organizations and their implications for decision-making. Drawing on a multi-sited ethnographic study in three Danish child welfare agencies, the analysis clarifies the multiple purposes of deliberation in everyday practice and shows how deliberation is enabled and structured by formalized and informal deliberative organizational routines. Findings show that deliberation may influence individual decision-making or amount to collective decision-making. Depending on how deliberative organizational routines are enacted, deliberation may serve to enhance professional judgment, ensure appropriate justification for decisions and alleviate uncertainty and emotional strain. Yet, while deliberation represents a productive form of collective coping, deliberative routines may also obscure transparency and reify dysfunctional group dynamics. A conceptual framework is developed to support further research into the purposes, practices, and implications of deliberation across diverse street-level contexts.

Keywords

Street-level decision-making, deliberation, organizational ethnography, child welfare, professional judgment

Introduction

Every day, frontline workers make decisions that may profoundly affect the lives of citizens and shape their experience and view of the state. Frontline workers' discretionary decision-making is inherently ambivalent, at once a prerequisite for successful policy implementation and professional judgment and a potential threat to democratic accountability (Brehm and Gates 1997; Brodtkin 2011; Lipsky 1980; Sandfort 2000; Thomann, van Engen, and Tummers 2018; Tummers and Bekkers 2014; Zacka 2017). As famously argued by Lipsky, resources are often limited while policy goals are often overly ambitious, ambiguous, or conflicting. Consequently, frontline workers may be left to make sense of and prioritize between different goals, thus exercising discretion beyond the scope formally recognized by the organization (Lipsky 1980). Further, constant work pressures may lead to routinized coping behavior and mass processing of cases as a substitute for genuine reasoning (Tummers et al. 2015).

Frontline decision-making continues to attract substantial research attention. Yet, most studies focus on the public encounter with citizen-clients as the locus of decision-making, while deliberation among peers in the organizational backstage tend to remain out of sight—although such processes play an important role in shaping how frontline workers make decisions, cope with pressures and interact with citizen-clients (Goldman and Foldy 2015; Loyens 2019; Nisar and Maroulis 2017, Siciliano 2015, Zacka 2017). Given the richness and continued growth of the street-level literature, it is surprising that this aspect has so far received limited attention—particularly because the influence of peers has been acknowledged for decades (Lipsky 1980; Vinzant and Crothers 1998).

Several studies show how professional and organizational norms are internalized through processes of socialization, contribute to professional identity formation and function as mechanisms of control (Brehm and Gates 1997; Oberfield 2014; Riccucci 2005). Many have also observed that frontline

workers frequently consult with co-workers, managers and external partners (Hupe and Hill 2007; Keiser 2010; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2012). Some recent studies have focused directly on peer discussion groups (Goldman and Foldy 2015), workplace relationships (Nisar and Maroulis 2017) and broader social networks (Loyens 2019; Lotta and Marques 2020; Siciliano 2015), while others have highlighted collective forms of agency (Gofen 2014; Rutz et al. 2017).

Yet frontline behavior remains primarily treated as a “collection of isolated individual actions” (Gofen 2014, 485), while studies that focus on groups and collaborative practices are few and far between (Foldy and Buckley 2010; Hupe, Hill, and Buffat 2016). In other words, the prevalence of deliberation is widely recognized, but we still know little about when, how and why frontline workers engage in deliberation and collective uses of discretion, or the implications of such practices for decision-making and policy implementation. Drawing on rich empirical material from a multi-sited ethnographic study in three Danish child welfare agencies, this study addresses the following three research questions: Why do frontline workers engage in deliberation? When and how does deliberation unfold in everyday practice? What are the implications for decision-making?

In the following, I discuss the literature on street-level work and argue that there is a need for explorative research regarding the role of deliberation. I then present the research context along with the study’s interpretive and inductive research approach. The analysis first presents the *rationale* underpinning deliberation (why) and then unfolds the variety of deliberative practices in frontline work (when and how). Due to their routinized nature, I define these practices as *deliberative organizational routines*. I then discuss how variations in the enactment of these routines influence decision-making (implications) and present an empirically grounded conceptual model of the role of deliberation in frontline decision-making. Finally, I discuss implications for theory and practice as well as limitations and suggest avenues for future research.

Theoretical Background: Street-Level Decision-Making and Deliberation

The rich and expanding street-level literature holds many valuable insights regarding frontline behavior. As argued by Lipsky, the cross-pressures stemming from ambiguous and conflicting policy goals and incentives, increasing demands of citizen-clients, and insufficient resources may result in the development of coping strategies (Brodkin 2011; Lipsky 1980; van Loon and Jakobsen 2018), later defined by Tummers et al. as “behavioral 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 et al. 2015, 1100). While coping can be seen as a “special case” of behavior, it is also sometimes used as “an ‘umbrella-like term’ to indicate what happens within street-level bureaucracies overall” (Hupe and Hill 2019, 23).

In regard to decision-making, one strand of studies focus on individual sources of variation, including individual preferences, attitudes and personality traits, such as enforcement style (May and Winter 2000), adherence to agency goals and perceptions of other organizational actors (Keiser 2010), policy preferences (Baviskar and Winter 2017), emotional capabilities (Jensen and Pedersen 2017), and work experience (Pedersen, Stritch, and Thuesen 2018). Others highlight the embeddedness of street-level bureaucrats in broader organizational and societal contexts (Hupe, Hill, and Buffat 2016; Sandfort 2000). These studies convincingly demonstrate that frontline workers are also moral agents influenced by social identities and societal norms. Drawing not just on policy regulations and rules but also on normative reasoning and pragmatic improvisation, they may categorize citizen-clients based on stereotypes or perceptions of worth and deservingness (Andersen and Guul 2019; Harrits 2019; Harrits and Møller 2014; Jilke and Tummers 2018; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003; Raaphorst and Groeneveld 2018; Rosenthal and Peccei 2006) and sometimes go above and beyond their means to help (Dubois 2010; Lavee 2020; Lavee and Strier 2019; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2012; Tummers et al. 2015).

Peers also exert an important influence on frontline decision-making. Studies have found that socialization and supervision are the most influential forms of control and highlighted the role of professional norms (e.g. Brehm and Gates 1997; Riccucci 2005). Professional norms are internalized through socialization and enforced by sanctions from within professional groups. They function as a “guarantee” that services will be delivered according to appropriate standards because “an occupation can hardly keep its status as a profession in the long run if sloppy practices are widespread among individual professionals” (Andersen and Pedersen 2012, 48). As Zacka observes, there is often disagreement among peers “*within* the ambit of professional behavior” (Zacka 2019, 458; italics in original). Even if frontline workers adhere to professional norms, they must often prioritize between equally desirable but conflicting goals and values, which cannot be realized simultaneously (Molander and Grimen 2010; Zacka 2017). Competent professionals who reason thoroughly and conscientiously may reach different conclusions regarding the best course of action. This “burden of discretion” is inherent to professional work (Molander and Grimen 2010, 183–84).

In sum, street-level work is characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and an inherent scarcity of resources to meet demand. Consequently, decision-making is not merely a matter of “legal abidance” or “cultural abidance” (Zang and Musheno 2017); it is a complex practice riddled with true dilemmas which involves rational, ethical, and professional choices (Gofen 2014). Further, frontline workers must navigate a complex web of accountability relations, including public-administrative, professional and participatory accountability (Hupe and Hill 2007) and peer-level accountability (Zacka 2017; 2019). What is considered divergence from one perspective may also reflect prioritization and adherence to a different set of norms, values, and expectations of account-giving, which may, from a different perspective, be considered equally legitimate. It is not surprising, then, if frontline workers often turn to their peers (Nisar and Maroulis 2017, Siciliano 2015).

Deliberation and Collective Uses of Discretion

Deliberation can be defined as “a discussion and consideration by a group of persons (...) of the reasons for and against a measure” (Merriam-Webster.Com Dictionary, s.v. ‘Deliberation’ n.d.). As outlined above, many studies of frontline decision-making have noted such activities in passing, but few have directly examined deliberative practices and collective uses of discretion. One important contribution is Zacka’s (2017) account of peer-level accountability. Zacka observes how frontline workers “relentlessly observe and probe each other’s working style” and thereby serve as a both disciplining and formative influence on each other’s moral dispositions (Zacka 2017, 182-183).

Another prominent study is Goldman and Foldy’s analysis of peer discussion groups in different social work contexts. They find that the groups provided frontline workers with a forum in which they “debated how to resolve dilemmas in light of their collective experience and understanding of the clients they served, discussed the norms and standards of their field and other sources of authority, and drew on the range of resources at their disposal to consider solutions to common problems” (Goldman and Foldy 2015, 167). The groups help frontline workers develop guiding principles that take into account broader policy implications as well as individual client needs and function as systems of accountability oriented towards including several different perspectives. The authors also find that peer discussion groups are important venues for creative problem-solving and group learning and, therefore, potentially valuable management tools for improving service delivery.

A related example is Rutz et al.’s comparative study of Dutch and English care inspectorates, which focuses on different ways of engaging in collective uses of discretion. Rutz et al. show how “inspectors create collectives to use their discretion effectively” by engaging other inspectors as well as managers, experts, and stakeholders and incorporating their skills, knowledge, and authority (Rutz et al. 2017, 82). Comparing two cases, the study also demonstrates that the way this collective discretion is exercised depends on the inspectorates’ organizational form. In one inspectorate,

collective discretion is organized as teams are granted discretionary room, whereas in the other inspectorate, the exercise of collective discretion depends on the initiative of individual inspectors.

Other studies touch upon the importance of deliberation among peers in terms of dealing with dilemmas and uncertainty. For example, Gofen (2014) observes that conversations with peers directly influence frontline workers' behavior as they turn to their colleagues "to inquire how they *feel* about the implemented policy, what they *think* about it, and whether they *do* anything different than what is expected from them" – and concludes that street-level divergence "may be experienced and practiced as an *individual* or a *collective* action" (Gofen 2014, 485; italics in original). In a similar vein, Raaphorst (2018) observes that deliberation with peers plays an important role as tax officials deal with uncertainty in their work: "Tax officials indicate they deliberate with colleagues in case of doubt, in order to have a back-up and to struggle less with it afterwards" (Raaphorst 2018, 498).

In their joint study of the Belgian labor inspectorate and the Dutch tax authorities Raaphorst and Loyens show that frontline workers try to make their decisions less subjective by relying on their colleagues' judgments (Raaphorst and Loyens 2018, 22). This echoes Harrits and Møller's observations that both home nurses and kindergarten teachers "say they never make 'hard decisions' on their own, but share their authoritative responsibilities with colleagues" (Harrits and Møller 2014, 457), and that "all professions refer to the formal procedures for handling cases of serious worry, as well as to organizational and collegiate forums for discussing and deliberating on worries" (Harrits and Møller 2014, 460). They also note that both home nurses, school teachers, and kindergarten teachers work "mainly in collegial teams as well as individually" (Harrits and Møller 2014, 457).

Together, these studies all point to the significance of deliberation and underscore the relevance of paying more attention to collaborative practices and collective forms of agency in street-level decision-making. They further highlight the importance of studying not only formalized practices of

deliberation, such as peer discussion groups, but also informal deliberative practices. In sum, there is still a need for explorative in-depth studies that closely examine the backstage processes of frontline work, or what Goldman and Foldy refer to as “the space before action”, that is, “the processes through which workers make decisions and, in particular, how they deliberate with one another about practice problems” (Goldman and Foldy 2015, 166). Below, I present the interpretive research approach taken in this study with the purpose of exploring the rationales that underpin deliberation in frontline work, the nature of deliberative practices, and their implications for decision-making.

Research Approach

The data used in this study stems from a multi-sited organizational ethnography (Ybema et al. 2009) of three child welfare agencies in Denmark.

Policy context

Child welfare generally involves investigating cases of suspected child abuse and neglect and, if deemed necessary, instigating relevant and proportionate interventions. Interventions range from preventive measures, such as parent management training programs, to removing children from their home without parents’ consent. Lipsky himself describes child welfare workers as “the ultimate street-level bureaucrats” because of the discrepancy between their working conditions and the severity and dilemmas involved in their task (Lipsky 2010, 233). As a case of frontline work, child welfare services present a high-stakes environment with high levels of uncertainty and complexity, prolonged interactions with citizen-clients, and considerable room for discretion. Scholars in the field have highlighted the need to improve decision-making in child welfare and point to deliberation and peer supervision as valuable tools in this regard (Munro et al. 2017; Ebsen 2018; Golia and McGovern 2015; Iversen and Heggen 2016; Skivenes and Tonheim 2015; Forkby and Höjer 2011). These

characteristics make child welfare a case well-suited for exploring the role of deliberation in frontline work with the aim of generating fresh theoretical insights (Flyvbjerg 2011).

The Danish child welfare system operates within a social democratic welfare state context of universalism. It is similar to that of other Scandinavian countries in being oriented towards the “best interests of the child” as frontline professionals are trained to assess for child wellbeing, and child and family need, and “efforts to maintain family integrity can be extensive and long lasting” (Berrick et al. 2017, 307). In contrast, child welfare systems in the UK and the US are more risk- and safety-oriented, frontline workers to a greater extent rely on standardized tools to assess imminent harm or risk of harm, and services are typically more targeted and time bound. Recent public scandals of undetected child abuse and neglect have been accompanied by an increasingly detailed regulation of casework and efforts to implement standardized assessment tools and evidence-based interventions, often “imported” from the US and the UK (Hestbæk 2011; Møller 2019). Still, child welfare workers in Denmark are granted considerable professional discretion in comparison with other countries.

The main responsibility for implementing and administering child welfare legislation and provisions lies with the country’s 98 municipalities and their local child welfare agencies. The study was carried out in three agencies in two municipalities: “Crocusville” in Eastern Denmark with a population of approx. 600,000 (Agency A and Agency B: the largest and smallest, respectively, of six local agencies) and “Heatherhill” in Western Denmark with a population of approx. 87,000 (Agency C). The two municipalities differed in geographical location, size, and clientele (large city versus town and countryside) but were alike in having allocated considerable resources to professional development in spite of consistent budget cuts. Thus, participants – particularly coordinators and first-line supervisors – were highly reflective about current practices.

Methods and Data

The study is based on organizational ethnography, as this approach is well-suited to “illuminate the processes and meanings associated with a phenomenon in a real-life setting” (Ospina, Esteve, and Lee 2017, 594); in this case, deliberative practices in frontline work. The strength of ethnography is that it “locates data collection on organizational practices in the specific context in which they occur” and allows the researcher to observe what research participants actually do rather than relying solely on what they say or think they do (Brodkin 2011, i261). Its potential lies in the development of analytical concepts and theoretical generalizations that “articulate particular relationships or enactments” and “offer insights for understanding other situations while being historically and contextually grounded” (Feldman and Orlikowski 2011, 1249).

I carried out fieldwork over a period of 14 months (October 2015-December 2016), fluctuating between more and less intense periods of engagement. This allowed me to gain access to the organizational backstage of the three agencies, that is, everything that goes on “behind the scenes”, including internal operations and work routines, documents and artefacts, and the emotional life, frustrations, tactics, and strategies that unfold as part of everyday organizational life (Brower, Abolafia, and Carr 2000, 384). The generated data comprises field notes from 29 days (approx. 150 hours) of observation, as well as 29 planned semi-structured interviews with agency directors, professional development consultants, district managers, first-line supervisors, coordinators, and two groups of frontline workers: caseworkers and family therapists. (See Appendix 1 for an overview of fieldwork activities and Appendix 2 for an overview of participants’ titles, roles and responsibilities).

I spent 22 of the 29 days shadowing five coordinators; two in Agency A, two in Agency B, and one in Agency C. Shadowing is a well-known way of performing organizational ethnography (Czarniawska 2007; Gill, Barbour, and Dean 2014) that allowed me to move around the agencies and observe both formal meetings with frontline workers, managers, and external partners, and informal

interaction, desk time, lunch breaks, educational activities, and social events. I engaged in numerous conversations and unplanned interviews with different participants, primarily frontline workers, but did not participate in meetings between frontline workers and citizen-clients. Participants' extensive use of computers, tablets and notebooks enabled me to write field notes during discussions or immediately after, noting statements and sometimes entire conversations almost verbatim, without drawing too much attention to myself. At the end of each day, field notes were checked for comprehensiveness, sketches were improved and jottings were converted into real sentences. I also added an overview of the day, notes on my responses to different situations and experiences, and reflective remarks (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011; Miles and Huberman 1994, 66pp).

I also conducted formal semi-structured interviews with 29 participants. Some were interviewed in groups, and some key participants were interviewed more than once (see online appendix). Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and focused on participants' reflections on roles, responsibilities, work routines, and organizational and professional developments. The interview guide was adjusted to match participants' different roles (see online appendix). The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and imported into NVIVO for analysis. I also collected various documents and artefacts (e.g. strategy documents, templates, and checklists) that provided background information about organizational goals and values and managerial strategies and actions.

Analytical Procedures

In accordance with the interpretive research design (Haverland and Yanow 2012; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012) and inductive logic of the study (Nowell and Albrecht 2018), the analytical process was iterative and recursive, moving back and forth between data, analytical memos, emerging schemes, and theory. The analytical process began during fieldwork with several overlapping stages (see Appendix 3). I continuously wrote analytical and theoretical memos to connect incidents, new ideas, and emerging insights (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). After completion of the fieldwork, I

combined open coding of interview transcripts, inspired by grounded theory techniques (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Charmaz 2014), and thematic content analysis of field notes. I used memos to connect participants' statements in interviews with my observations of their doings and sayings in everyday practice. The purpose of this grounded open-ended approach was to get close to the data and identify significant themes for in-depth cross-case analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994). Identified themes included "collective decision-making," "organizational routines," and "creating direction".

Round two consisted in further sorting and categorizing ("axial coding," Corbin and Strauss 2008) in combination with a close rereading of field notes and memos, focused on data relevant to the most significant codes from round one. In the example of "collective decision-making", this process led to the identification of the multiple purposes underpinning this practice, which was later re-labelled "deliberation". Some in vivo codes from the first round of coding were maintained (e.g., "elucidating cases") and new codes were generated (e.g., "providing emotional support"). To explore the role of routines, I identified and coded all observed organizational routines related to decision-making according to content, purpose, participants, artefacts, etc., to identify similarities and differences. This led to the identification of similar types of deliberative routines across the agencies and to the development of the overarching category of "deliberative organizational routines" to conceptualize what these seemingly different routines all had in common.

Throughout the analytical process, I systematically searched the data for doings, sayings, and incidents to disconfirm emerging insights ("negative case analysis"), and later sought to validate my interpretations by consulting with study participants and representatives from other child welfare agencies ("member checking") (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2009). For the purposes of presentation, quotes were translated into English. Minor adjustments were made to ensure intelligibility while maintaining the original meaning, for example by translating idioms into their English equivalents.

Findings

Decision-making as a Process of Creating Direction

Across all three agencies, participants expressed a distinct processual understanding of decision-making. This is related to the high levels of uncertainty and complexity in child welfare work. Often, neither problems nor solutions can be clearly defined from the outset, and cases are often discussed in a variety of fora before a formal decision is made to intervene. After the sometimes months-long waiting period before an intervention can begin, decisions are reassessed and adjusted to match the constantly evolving lives of families as well as changing circumstances, such as the availability of particular therapists or programs or budget restraints. Hence, participants tend to view decisions as entryways rather than end products. They refer to decision-making as “creating direction” and often use pathfinding metaphors, debating if they “should go left or right” or “whether we are on the right track.” In this context, decision-making processes appear as continuous and unmistakably collective undertakings that may, over time, involve deliberation among co-workers, coordinators, first-line supervisors, district managers, and external partners, in addition to the families themselves.

The Multiple Purposes of Deliberation

The prevalence of deliberation in the organizational backstage is rooted in the fact that coordinators and managers generally view decision-making as a collective responsibility. As one deputy district manager frankly stated: “Nobody here makes decisions on their own!” Instead, frontline workers are expected and even required to involve others in their decisions, particularly when situations are not straightforward, which is often the case. Deliberation is thus regarded as an important part of decision-making and an essentially *professional* activity. Across all agencies, the rationale behind engaging in deliberation appeared to encompass multiple purposes, all of which were believed to serve the overarching purpose of qualifying professional judgment and decision-making by turning it into a collaborative effort (see Table 1).

Elucidating cases. The first purpose relates to uncertainty and complexity and is referred to as “elucidating cases.” Service managers and coordinators often talk about deliberation as a matter of “elucidating” or “broadening” a case. This involves mobilizing the knowledge, experiences, and perspectives held by different professionals, thereby broadening and deepening the team’s and the responsible caseworker’s perspective and understanding of a case as illustrated below.

Case discussion meeting, Agency A: One of the therapists presents a case on which she has spent several months (or is it years?). The mother is finally doing well and the therapist was getting ready to close the case when the school notified the agency that their concern for the child was increasing. The therapist is baffled. Could it be that she failed to notice something of importance? After a systematic round of clarifying questions, it becomes clear that the school is collaborating closely with the father. One participant hypothesizes that this could influence the school’s perception of the mother and perhaps generate antipathy towards her alternative parenting style. The therapist says she will investigate this further (Field notes, Agency A).

Elucidating cases through deliberation is regarded by many participants as a means to raise the quality of decisions and enable more targeted interventions.

Mobilizing knowledge. The second purpose is that of mobilizing knowledge. This is an important aspect of elucidating cases and supporting the quality of decision-making, but it also has a broader organizational purpose beyond specific cases. Through the orchestration of deliberation, coordinators and first-line supervisors aim to build strong communities of practice, where the knowledge and experiences held by individual workers is transformed into shared repositories of knowledge:

They are on very different levels with regard to how reflective they are, how much experience they have, and how much education they have, and I think it is interesting to see how they can give each other something. Because some are very interested in theories and, you know, read books on the side at home, and one took a master's degree. And if some of those who have that can give something to some of those who are more practically minded; that, I think, is interesting. Because then we get this common knowledge. (Coordinator, Agency C).

The display of individual workers' knowledge and experiences during orchestrated deliberations is also meant to catalyze informal knowledge sharing outside of meetings, because, as one coordinator says: "if we work as one-man armies, knowledge is lost" (Family therapists' coordinator, Agency B).

Explicating reasoning. A third purpose is to require frontline workers to explicate their reasoning, that is, to explain and justify decisions and interventions with explicit references to both legal frameworks and professional knowledge:

When they are facing a difficult problem, I try (...) to ask some questions and give them some input as to: 'How might you do things differently?' Like, 'If you think he should be placed in institutional care, what could we do instead?' I mean, 'Why do you think that? What would the purpose be? What do you think the outcome would be?' (Casework coordinator, Agency C).

Participants explain that practicing this skill will improve frontline workers' ability to explain and justify their decisions to citizen-clients and other stakeholders. This again will help agencies meet external demands for public-administrative and professional accountability through increased transparency, documentation and justification; demands that have increased as public scandals have revealed negligence and incompetence in some child welfare agencies. Further, workers' ability to

explicate their reasoning is considered an important aspect of current transitions towards more collaborative and connective forms of work in increasingly cross-professional settings.

Filtering idiosyncratic judgments. A fourth purpose concerns the role of gut feelings and idiosyncratic judgments and is related to the understanding of frontline workers as moral agents who enact social norms and identities, which is also prevalent in the literature. Many participants point out that gut feelings have gained a bad reputation in the child welfare policy debate, as representing the opposite of evidence-based decision-making and sound professional judgment, but nevertheless emphasize their importance: “I do not think I have ever experienced at any time that either myself or my colleague has said, ‘I sense something here’, where it has not been right” (Caseworker, Agency C). However, while they consider it a moral obligation to act on their gut feelings, participants also view the critical questioning of gut feelings as a trademark of professionalism: “How can we investigate it? How can you clarify this feeling? And what can you do about it? Right? That is where professionalism comes in, I think, and professional judgment” (Coordinator, group interview, Agency C). Here, deliberation serves to filter out valuable gut feelings from idiosyncratic judgments, which may have more to do with emotional strain or “bad chemistry.”

Collectivizing responsibility. Fifth, deliberation serves to collectivize the exercise of professional judgment and thereby the responsibility for prioritizing between equally desirable but conflicting goals and values. As one coordinator states:

There are no caseworkers who act on their own and reject something that would require professional judgment. I mean, it is not economic calculations we bring to the [team] meeting, if you follow me? It is that which requires judgment. Where it gets difficult or very vulnerable and where we need to sharpen our focus on equal treatment and consistent casework (Coordinator, Agency B).

In this way, deliberation serves to alleviate the aforementioned “burdens of discretion” of individual frontline workers. Sometimes this is built into formal procedures as some decisions require consultation and approval from higher-ups who then become formally accountable. At other times, deliberation fulfils this purpose informally by providing individual frontline workers with some assurance that, supported by their peers, they have reached a reasonable and satisfactory decision.

Providing emotional support. The sixth purpose reflects the fact that the overwhelming complexity and tragedy of some cases can result in feelings of inadequacy. Moreover, the looming risk of violence may affect frontline workers’ physical and mental health:

As we walk through the hallways, I notice that all name plates have been removed from the caseworkers’ office doors. The coordinator explains that this is due to a recent incident, where a 16-year-old boy entered the building in search of his caseworker, shouting that he was going to kill her. The incident resulted in a month-long sick leave for the caseworker. The coordinator remarks that it was a bit surprising because the caseworker was a “robust” type who had been in the trade for years and seen quite a lot in her time. “But,” the coordinator continues, “you never know what the straw is going to be” (Field notes, Agency B).

Stressful situations may have severe consequences for both frontline workers and citizen-clients if they are not adequately dealt with. Therefore, as explained by a different coordinator, there needs to be “a space for the caseworker to say: ‘Damn, this is so difficult!’ (...) because otherwise I would fear that someone would sit in the office and try to deal with it all on their own, and perhaps the citizen will not get the quality casework that everybody intended.” (Coordinator, Agency B). Deliberation also serves to provide and receive emotional support.

In sum, the rationale underpinning deliberation encompasses several purposes. By ensuring that cases are considered from multiple perspectives, deliberation is considered a way of enhancing professional judgment and increasing decision quality. Moreover, deliberation helps frontline workers justify decisions and manage accountability towards the public-administrative system, the professional community, their immediate peers, and citizen-clients. Finally, deliberation alleviates the burden of discretion and enables them to deal with uncertainty, complexity and emotional strain. In this sense, deliberation also represents a collective—and potentially very productive—form of coping. Table 1 presents an overview of the purposes of deliberation.

Table 1. The Rationale behind Deliberation: A Multiplicity of Purposes

| Purpose | Explanation | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Enhancing professional judgment | Elucidating cases | Inviting multiple perspectives to discover alternative understandings of problems and solutions |
| | Mobilizing knowledge | Showcasing frontline workers’ knowledge, build common repository of knowledge and encourage knowledge sharing |
| Justifying decisions | Explicating reasoning | Practicing frontline workers’ ability to explain their reasoning to support transparency and enable (cross-professional) deliberation |
| | Filtering idiosyncratic judgments | Scrutinizing frontline workers’ gut feelings to separate personal grievances from professional intuition |

| | | | |
|------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Alleviating burdens | { | Collectivizing responsibility | Alleviating frontline workers' burdens of discretion by providing assurance and/or formally sharing responsibility for decision outputs |
| | | Providing emotional support | Recognizing emotional strain, allowing frontline workers to vent frustrations and deal with physical and mental health threats |

Deliberative Organizational Routines

Importantly, deliberation is not confined to designated meetings, but is closely interweaved with other aspects of everyday practice. However, even if deliberative practices are not always formalized, they still appear as highly routinized. In all three agencies, I identified a number of different routines that shared one important characteristic, namely that they all enabled deliberation. Drawing on Feldman and Pentland's (2003) definition of organizational routines as repetitive, recognizable, and inherently dynamic patterns of interdependent actions, I define these as *deliberative organizational routines*; that is, organizational routines that enable deliberation, during which one or more cases are discussed and potentially decided upon.

The deliberative organizational routines identified in all agencies range from formalized and highly structured case processing routines and weekly team meetings over ad hoc case conferences and individual case reviews to informal but still highly routinized practices. In everyday practice, individual decision-making is intertwined with and influenced by these routines, some of which are coerced while others are optional. Further, deliberations often result in decidedly collective decision-making—sometimes intentionally as some deliberative routines (e.g., referral routines in Agencies A and B) have been designed to enable collective decision-making, at other times incidentally. In other words, deliberative organizational routines shape decision outputs, both by influencing individual

decision-making and by, intentionally or incidentally, enabling collective decision-making. Below, I present six deliberative organizational routines: Referral procedures, team meetings, ad hoc case conferences, individual case reviews, the daily rounds, and doorway deliberations. Each of these routines was observed in all three agencies across different teams with little variation except for referral procedures (see Table 2). The routines are presented in order of decreasing formalization.

Referral procedures is the process of formally referring parents or children to a specific program and/or service provider based on the investigation report and action plan, which outlines identified problems and goals and must be agreed to by the family. In Agency A, a routine has been established where referral decisions are made by a small committee of family therapists, the family services coordinator, and if possible, the casework coordinator. Caseworkers contribute only via written case files. In Agency B, referral decisions are integrated in the caseworkers' discussion meeting and are made collectively by the full team of caseworkers and the casework coordinator, accompanied by one family therapist and the family therapists' coordinator. The role of the latter two is to weigh in and supply information regarding the availability of specific therapists/programs. This is a relatively new routine. The former routine required individual caseworkers to present their case and recommendation before a committee of supervisors and managers, who would then deliberate and make the decision collectively. In Agency C, caseworkers are authorized to refer families and children to preventive programs without consulting others, while more comprehensive interventions require authorization. Even so, caseworkers usually discuss pending decisions with the coordinator or peers before acting.

Although referral procedures vary between the agencies, they all encompass deliberation and collective decision-making as a natural element. However, the differences between routines regarding the number and groups of professionals involved have implications for the decision-making process. In Agency A, the first-line supervisor explained that the routine intentionally privileged family therapists' professional expertise over caseworkers' personal knowledge of the case, whereas in

Agency B, the family therapists felt that their expertise was neglected. In Agency C, caseworkers were reluctant to use their authority, so the coordinator spent much time engaging in informal conversations that appeared to compensate for the lack of a formalized deliberative routine. As I will discuss in more detail below, these differences are likely to be consequential for decision outputs and thus, indirectly, for citizen-client outcomes as different participants bring different knowledge and perspectives to bear on the case.

Team meetings are held weekly, last up to three hours, and provide occasions for participants to discuss ongoing cases. With little variation, they are generally structured in three phases facilitated by the coordinator. First, the responsible frontline worker will present the case and specify what they need in terms of input. Then there is a round of questions. After this, participants offer reflections and suggestions. This process often shapes a pending decision or leads to adjustments of ongoing interventions and sometimes amounts to collective decision-making, as illustrated below:

Five caseworkers, one network consultant, the coordinator, and I are seated around a large white oval table as we are getting ready for the regular case discussion meeting in the children's team. Everyone has notebooks in front of them, and water or coffee cups. Some are drinking Coca Cola. Anna, a young caseworker, is the first to present her case, which has just been presented before the Committee. It concerns a young child, 1½ years old, who spent their whole life in an institution with their mother. Everyone in the Committee meeting agreed that the child should now be placed in foster care, and a foster family is ready. After a brief discussion concerning a financial issue, she asks for the team's advice on a pending decision regarding contact between the child and the biological parents. She explains that the parents have difficulties being stable; they make great promises, especially Father, but then fail to show up. "Right now," she says, "I am thinking minimum

contact, once per month.” A long discussion follows as different team members ask questions and weigh in. Several of them argue in favor of more frequent contact, partly based on research, which points to the importance of protecting the attachment between a child and its biological parents. Anna says that the idea behind deciding on the minimum requirement, i.e. once per month, was also to make it more manageable for the parents. “But I see what you are saying,” she nods. The coordinator summarizes the line of reasoning and the conclusion, namely that Mother should have more frequent contact, that is, every two weeks. She asks some follow-up questions and then looks Anna straight in the eyes. “Do you feel wiser now?” she asks. Anna says yes and asks how she should communicate the decision to the parents (Field notes, Agency B).

In this case, the caseworker is preparing for a decision about the amount of contact between a child and its biological parents while the child is in foster care. The law states the child’s, and hence the parents’, minimum rights to contact, but caseworkers have discretion to decide on the interval (e.g., every two weeks) and duration (hours) of contact. We see how the deliberative process and reflections and arguments of her co-workers do not only shape Anna’s decision but effectively *become* the decision, resulting in a significantly different outcome for the citizen-client (i.e., the biological mother will have the right to see her child twice as often compared to Anna’s initial inclination).

Ad hoc case conferences differ from team meetings by including external partners but dynamics are broadly similar to the ones observed in team meetings with regards to the fact that deliberations may both amount to decisions and shape ensuing ones.

Individual case reviews are typically scheduled every 4-8 weeks. The enactment of this routine involves the coordinator and frontline worker going over the frontline workers’ list of cases. For

caseworkers, the main focus is on meeting deadlines and documentation requirements, and coordinators often help caseworkers manage the digital case filing system or draft decision letters to families. For family therapists, reviews revolve around problematic cases, prioritizing resources, and managing the workload. A first-line supervisor describes the latter as a “Sisyphean task” of “playing dominos” with the therapists’ schedules. If a review reveals that a family therapist is overworked, the coordinator may suggest various adjustments, which will then be discussed with the caseworker. In one case, the therapist was to stop working with the grandmother and focus on the mother to reduce the number of hours, thereby significantly altering the intervention. The example shows that formal decisions regarding interventions are not set in stone but continuously adjusted and negotiated.

In addition to the formalized routines presented above, participants across agencies engage in a number of informal routines, which can also be characterized as deliberative organizational routines. In all three agencies, two informal deliberative routines were enacted on a daily basis: the daily rounds and doorway deliberations.

The daily rounds is a routine performed by all coordinators at least once a day and consists in walking through the building, stopping at every office and desk to check in on team members and often also professionals in other teams. One coordinator referred to this as “the daily rounds,” invoking the routine performed by doctors in hospitals as they walk around to check on individual patients. Coordinators generally spend great amounts of time every day answering questions, offering second opinions, and trying to teach especially newcomers how things should be done. They are frequently called on at their desks, when walking down the hallway, eating their lunch (also often at their desks), or waiting by the coffee machine, and are clearly missed when they are unavailable. As one coordinator smilingly remarks as we walk back to the office after a morning of meetings: “Now I will go to back to playing ‘A Thousand Questions to the Professor’; that is what it’s usually like when I

have been gone for a while” (Field notes, Agency C). The daily rounds is a routinized way of meeting demands and make sure that pressing issues are taken care of as soon as possible.

Doorway deliberations are essentially discussions similar to those outlined above, which routinely unfold outside of formalized deliberative routines, in what the first-line supervisor in Agency A refers to as the “in-betweens”: the time and space outside of formalized meetings. Doorway deliberations are a supplement to the daily rounds but do not necessarily involve coordinators. Coordinators and supervisors actively encourage these deliberations and view them as a form of informal knowledge sharing. Frontline workers also speak positively of what one refers to as *knowledge availability*: “That kind of ‘Do you have five minutes?’ Where it is not something that needs to be prearranged” (Family Nurse, Agency C).

Like formalized deliberations, the daily rounds and doorway deliberations both play an important role in decision-making. One first-line supervisor repeatedly spoke about little “twists” and “pushes”, explaining how informal deliberations shape interventions and lay the ground for ensuing formal decisions. In one situation, the casework coordinator and a young caseworker came to see the family therapists’ coordinator. They explained that they wanted a different therapist on a specific case because they believed that the mother’s “temperament” clashed with the assigned therapist’s personality. The family therapists’ coordinator found this assessment improper and characterized it as “speculation”. When they left, she criticized that the caseworker’s assessment was communicated in a spontaneous informal conversation and not in a formal meeting. In a formal meeting, she argued, such assumptions would not just be accepted but provide an occasion for exploring the underlying mechanisms of the observed dynamics by generating hypotheses that could be tested in direct interaction with the family. This would then form the basis for a decision. Instead, she found that the caseworkers had simply “created a story,” resulting in a decision to remove the family therapist from the case without further (formalized) discussion.

Table 2. Types of Deliberative Organizational Routines Identified in All Agencies

| Type | Form | Content | Participants | Formalization |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Referral procedures | Varies between agencies | Discuss cases with the purpose of referring citizen-clients to specific programs and/or service providers | Varies between agencies but requires that participants are authorized to allocate funds | High |
| Team meetings | Discussion among team members led by the coordinator, sometimes cross-professional (varies across agencies and teams) | Discuss cases to inform decision-making Discuss other issues of broad relevance (e.g., new knowledge, upcoming events, organizational issues, management initiatives, relations to stakeholders) | Coordinator and team members, sometimes participants from different professional groups (internal or external) | High |
| Ad hoc case conferences | Collective discussion of one case among all involved frontline workers | Discuss a specific case to adjust the direction and/or inform decision-making | Internal and external frontline workers involved in the case, coordinator and/or service manager | Medium |

| Type | Form | Content | Participants | Formalization |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Individual case reviews | One-on-one discussion between coordinator and frontline worker, often in front of computer screen | Discuss ongoing cases (progress, problems) Control deadlines and budgets Manage individual workloads | Coordinator, frontline worker | Medium |
| The daily rounds | “Checking in” with professional teams, as coordinator walks around offices and hallways | Stay up to speed on ongoing cases Answer questions, engage in deliberation, advise on and approve course of action | Coordinator, frontline workers | Low |
| Doorway deliberations | Ad hoc discussions involving the coordinator and one or more frontline workers | Dealing with a variety of issues on the go to maintain workflow and avoid wasting time waiting for formalized meetings | Coordinator, frontline workers, service managers | None |

The Influence of Deliberative Organizational Routines on Decision-Making

Deliberative routines are the organizational manifestation of participants' understanding that the exercise of professional judgment and discretion is a collective responsibility. The analysis demonstrates that deliberative routines may be highly productive in terms of enhancing professional judgment, justifying decisions, and alleviating the moral and emotional burdens associated with frontline work. However, both formalized and informal deliberative routines may also be enacted in ways that render their influence on decision-making problematic.

For example, the ambition to elucidate cases from all relevant perspectives and to mobilize and share knowledge held by diverse participants is challenged by the fact that all routines inevitably include some and exclude others. This may be intentional, that is, the result of careful and thoughtful selection of participants based on the perceived relevance of their knowledge, experience, and perspectives, or it may be incidental: a result of circumstances such as participants' availability. However, patterns of inclusion/exclusion may also reflect and even reify local hierarchies and power dynamics such as turf wars between professional groups. The referral routines in Agencies A and B, which respectively privilege family therapists' over caseworkers' perspectives and vice versa, exemplify this. Similarly, newcomers may find it difficult to challenge more experienced colleagues. Such dynamics are problematic, as the purposes of enhancing professional judgment and justifying decisions on appropriate grounds cannot be realized if gut feelings and skewed perspectives remain unchallenged and deliberations amount to conformism and groupthink rather than collective reflexivity.

Further, collectivizing responsibility and providing emotional support may alleviate the moral and emotional burdens faced by individual workers but could also obscure transparency and blur who is to be held accountable in cases of wrongful decisions – particularly when deliberations incidentally amount to collective decision-making. Such problems appear particularly pertinent in the case of

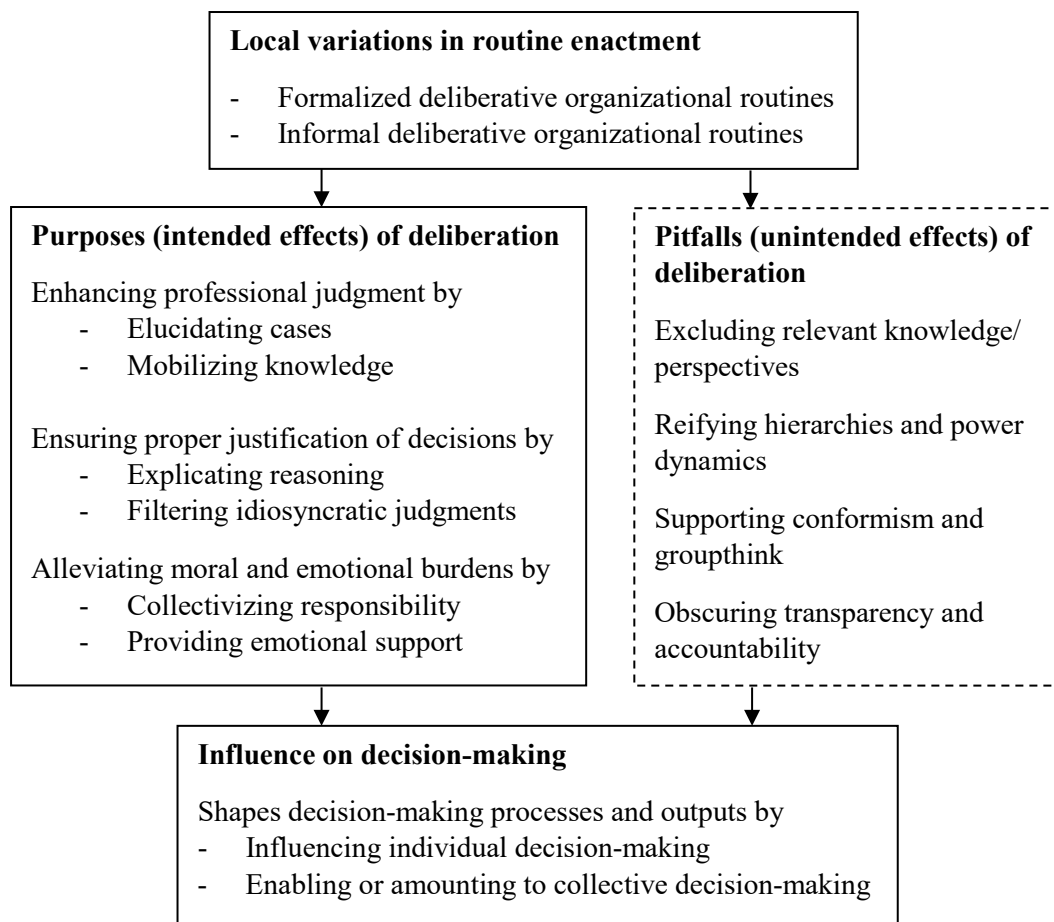
informal deliberations, as the little “twists” and “pushes” that result from them are not always recognized as acts of decision-making and therefore not always recorded, even if they are significant to (future) formal decisions. Hence, key considerations may be found missing when caseworkers or citizen-clients consult case records to make sense of past decisions and events.

Deliberative organizational routines are viewed by first-line supervisors and coordinators as valuable managerial tools for realizing the multiple purposes of deliberation in a both controlled and flexible manner and they spend a great deal of energy evaluating and changing these routines. These efforts, prompted by new insights or complaints from frontline workers or compelled by organizational restructuring, are aimed at orchestrating productive routines while discouraging dysfunctional ones. Striking this balance is a complex task, as both formalized and informal deliberative routines may be characterized as double-edged swords.

The findings indicate that frontline workers value formalized deliberative routines. If these are too few and infrequent to meet their needs, they will seek to fulfil the multiple purposes outlined above by way of informal deliberations. On the one hand, supervisors and managers envision and encourage such spontaneous and independently organized knowledge sharing and collaborative problem-solving as this enables an efficient workflow. Too many formalized deliberative routines may bind frontline workers to inefficient uses of their time and end up blocking the workflow (one coordinator illustratively speaks of “meeting ourselves to death”). On the other hand, informal deliberations may inhibit frontline workers’ awareness that decisions made under such conditions are not necessarily negligible or exempted from formal regulations and result in less transparent decision processes and outputs. In contrast, formalized deliberative routines present opportunities for skillfully orchestrated deliberation and diminish the risks of “unprofessional” reasoning and unjustified decisions—provided that they do not merely reify dysfunctional group dynamics.

In sum, there is great potential but also significant pitfalls or dark sides to deliberation. Although the latter was not explored systematically, the analysis suggests that deliberations may have both positive (intended) and negative (unintended) effects on decision outputs and, indirectly, citizen-client outcomes (see Figure 1). Put differently, local variations in the enactment of deliberative organizational routines have implications for *how* deliberations influence decision-making. This calls for coordinators and first-line supervisors to develop and nurture a reflexive awareness of the potentials and pitfalls of deliberation, engage in skillful orchestration, and strive for a balanced ecology of formalized and informal deliberative routines.

Figure 1. The Role of Deliberation and Deliberative Organizational Routines in Frontline Work



Discussion and Conclusions

Deliberation has long been recognized as a widespread activity in the rich and flourishing literature on street-level decision-making but has hitherto not received much focused attention from researchers in this field. This study adds nuance and complexity to our understanding of this phenomenon by unfolding the rationale and multiple purposes that underpin deliberation, the variety of deliberative organizational routines, and their implications for decision-making in a particular case of frontline work, namely child welfare. Findings show that deliberation both influences individual decision-making and often—intentionally or incidentally—amounts to collective decision-making.

The purposes of deliberation encompass elucidating cases, mobilizing relevant knowledge, filtering idiosyncratic judgments, encouraging the explication of reasoning, collectivizing responsibility, and providing emotional support. To the extent that these purposes are realized in practice, they contribute to fulfilling the overarching purposes of enhancing professional judgment, justifying decisions vis-a-vis public-administrative, professional, participatory, and peer-level accountability fora, and alleviating the burdens of frontline work—thereby enabling workers to cope with the uncertainty, complexity, and emotional strain of their task while protecting against undue influences. These findings are supported by prior research on intra-organizational professional networks and work relationships (e.g. Nisar and Maroulis 2017; Siciliano 2015) and social work research on peer supervision (e.g. Golia and McGovern 2015). Adding to these studies, the analysis highlights how deliberation may influence decision-making in both positive and negative ways due to variations in the enactment of deliberative organizational routines: relevant perspectives may be excluded due to professional turf wars or mere ignorance, reasoning and justification may be obscured rather than explicated and documented, conformism and groupthink may be sustained rather than challenged.

The study contributes to theory in several ways. First, the conceptualization of decision-making as a process of *creating direction* underscores the open-ended nature of decision-making in frontline settings characterized by prolonged rather than episodic encounters with citizen-clients. It highlights the need to recognize that decision-making does not always take the form of an event that is easily isolated from other aspects of everyday practice, nor does it necessarily take place in formalized meetings or other spaces, where decisions are supposedly made. If we primarily view decision-making as an isolated event or focus only on decision outputs, we risk over-simplifying the complex nature of frontline decision-making while neglecting important dynamics in the organizational backstage, that is, “the space before action” (Goldman and Foldy 2015), and how such dynamics shape encounters between individual frontline workers and citizen-clients (Loyens 2019).

Second, the study supports Goldman and Foldy’s concluding observations regarding the street-level literature’s premature dismissal of frontline workers’ reflective capacities and the potential of deliberation to support situated learning and build resilient communities of practice (Brown and Duguid 1991; Wenger 1999). It also extends this work by calling attention to the variety of deliberative practices, the significance of informal as well as formalized routines, and the importance of a balanced deliberative *routine ecology* (Feldman 2016). As institutionalized practices, deliberative routines create organizational spaces where frontline workers’ “normative reasoning and pragmatic improvisations are guided and tempered by others struggling with similar issues” (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000, s22); where they are allowed to speak not only as “citizen- and state-agents” (ibid.), but also as professional agents and peers (Zacka 2019; 2017).

While deliberative routines are thus valuable managerial tools for improving frontline decision-making (Goldman and Foldy 2015; Munro et al. 2017, Skivenes and Tonheim 2015; Zacka 2017), leveraging their potential requires reflexive awareness and skillful orchestration. This points to the crucial role of coordinators and first-line supervisors in cultivating professional uses of discretion

(Evans 2011; Hupe and Keiser 2019; Keulemans and Groeneveld 2020). Their efforts may involve minimizing the undue influence of professional turf wars, biased reasoning and normative judgments (Dubois 2010; Harrits 2019; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003; Rosenthal and Peccei 2007; 2006), orchestrating how frontline workers engage with different forms and sources of evidence to inform decision-making (Boaz et al. 2019; Forkby, Höjer, and Liljegren 2016; Møller 2019), dealing with emotional strain (Guy, Newman, and Mastracci 2014), and articulating, negotiating and/or integrating professional and organizational logics and role identities (Ellis 2011; Evans 2011; Goodrick and Reay 2011; Harris and Holt 2013; Noordegraaf 2015).

Third, the study contributes to our understanding of coping. As a collective form of coping, backstage deliberation is a way for frontline workers to manage multiple, not only vertical, accountability demands (Hupe and Hill 2007; Zacka 2017; 2019). This suggests that conceptualizing coping only as individual behaviors that occur during public service delivery (Tummers et al. 2015) may be too restrictive and even limiting to our understanding and assessment of the legitimacy of frontline practice, particularly because backstage deliberation may shape frontline workers' behavior during public encounters in both productive and problematic ways. This further underscores the importance of looking beyond frontline encounters to the organizational backstage and direct more research attention to collective forms of agency (Gofen 2014).

Limitations and suggestions for future research

The study also has a number of limitations. First, the data did not allow me to trace in detail how deliberations regarding specific cases translated into decisions and actions in the public encounter with citizen-clients. It would be interesting for future research to trace all the steps involved in case processing, determining more precisely when and how decisions are actually made, negotiated and changed. Second, although the findings rely on multiple observations in different settings, the study

focuses on a specific type of frontline work in specific local and national contexts. The transferability of the generated insights thus depends on similarities and differences between the research context and other contexts.

Danish child welfare workers are granted considerable professional discretion and rely on standardized tools and programs to a lesser degree than their peers in other countries, which could mean that they engage in deliberation more often. Yet, deliberation and collective uses of discretion is a recognized feature of child welfare work across national contexts (Ebsen 2018; Munro et al. 2017). In the case of child welfare, the issue is thus not whether deliberation occurs, but why, when, and how. As noted, all agencies had invested substantial resources in professional development. Some of the observed variations in the enactment of deliberative organizational routines may reflect this; for example, an increased use of formalized and orchestrated deliberations and reflexive awareness of potentials and pitfalls. It could also be hypothesized that the rationale behind deliberation varies in different settings. For example, the purposes of elucidating cases, mobilizing knowledge and filtering idiosyncratic judgment are perhaps more prevalent in settings where professional aspirations are prominent. In settings where such aspirations are not attended to, the emphasis might instead be on collectivizing responsibility and providing emotional support. The identified purposes and the concept of deliberative organizational routines thus serve as useful analytical devices across contexts.

Looking beyond the particular case, many frontline workers share conditions similar to those of child welfare workers, including high levels of uncertainty and complexity (Lipsky 2010; Raaphorst 2018), working in teams (Foldy and Buckley 2010; Harrits and Møller 2014; Rutz et al. 2017), and having prolonged rather than episodic interactions with citizen-clients (Gofen, Sella, and Gassner 2019). For many frontline workers, e.g. social workers, teachers, prison guards, community police officers, and health workers, encounters with citizen-clients are not isolated events but may continue for months or years, during which numerous decisions are made, enforced and reconsidered in light of changing

circumstances. Further, frontline workers are increasingly expected to engage in connective, collaborative, and cross-professional forms of work (Noordegraaf 2015; Loyens 2019). These conditions suggest that deliberation and related practices such as peer supervision and advice seeking within and across teams, organizations and professional groups, are widespread; a notion supported by previous studies in diverse fields such as police work, teaching, tax regulation and inspection (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2012, Siciliano 2015, Raaphorst 2018; Rutz et al. 2017).

Nevertheless, the routines and purposes associated with deliberation are most likely influenced by differences in tasks, clientele, regulatory frameworks, levels of uncertainty, complexity, and urgency, as well as professional, organizational, and national cultures, and whether the organization of work is conducive to deliberations in terms of time, place, space, and technology (Pollitt 2012).

The conceptual model developed here might serve as a starting point for further exploration of the places and spaces where decisions are actually made—focusing on frontline workers’ collective processes of reasoning in real-life settings—as well as comparative studies of the conditions for engaging in deliberation and the implications for decision-making in different street-level contexts (Hupe and Buffat 2014). Future research might also consider the role of deliberation in relation to sensemaking (Weick 1995) or the social construction of citizen-clients, problems and solutions (Forkby and Höjer 2011; Rosenthal and Peccei 2006), or examine how managers and supervisors can successfully realize the potentials of deliberation while avoiding their dark sides. By offering an empirically grounded conceptual framework of the role of deliberation in frontline decision-making, and raising awareness of its potentials and pitfalls, this study provides a foundation for both practitioners and researchers to explore these issues further.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available at Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory online.

Funding

(None)

Data Availability Statement

The data underlying this article cannot be shared publicly due to the sensitive nature of child welfare work and the privacy of individuals that participated in the study and their clients. Anonymized data may be shared on reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgements

For their detailed and constructive feedback, the author is grateful to the editors and three anonymous reviewers, Jodi Sandfort, Didde Cramer Jensen, Noortje de Boer, and my colleagues at Aarhus University. A previous version of this article was presented at the ISA Sociology of Professional Groups (RC52) Interim Meeting, University of Florence, 4-6 July 2019, and the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA) Conference, Queen's University, Belfast, 11-13 September 2019. I thank participants for helpful comments and suggestions.

References

- Andersen, Lotte Bøgh, and Lene Holm Pedersen. 2012. "Public Service Motivation and Professionalism." *International Journal of Public Administration* 35 (1): 46–57.
- Andersen, Simon Calmar, and Thorbjørn Sejr Guul. 2019. "Reducing Minority Discrimination at the Front Line—Combined Survey and Field Experimental Evidence." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 29 (3): 429–444.
- Baviskar, Siddhartha, and Søren C. Winter. 2017. "Street-Level Bureaucrats as Individual Policymakers: The Relationship between Attitudes and Coping Behavior toward Vulnerable Children and Youth." *International Public Management Journal* 20 (2): 316–53.
- Berrick, Jill, Jonathan Dickens, Tarja Pösö, and Marit Skivenes. 2017. "A Cross-Country Comparison of Child Welfare Systems and Workers' Responses to Children Appearing to Be at Risk or in Need of Help." *Child Abuse Review* 26 (4): 305–19.
- Boaz, Annette, Huw Davies, Alec Fraser, and Sandra Nutley. 2019. *What Works Now? Evidence-Informed Policy and Practice Revisited*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Brehm, John, and Scott Gates. 1997. *Working, Shirking, and Sabotage. Bureaucratic Response to a Democratic Public*. Michigan Studies in Political Analysis. Ann Arbor, US: University of Michigan Press.
- Brodkin, Evelyn Z. 2011. "Policy Work: Street-Level Organizations Under New Managerialism." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 21 (Supplement 2): i253–77.
- Brower, Ralph S., Mitchel Y. Abolafia, and Jered B. Carr. 2000. "On Improving Qualitative Methods in Public Administration Research." *Administration & Society* 32 (4): 363–97.
- Brown, John Seely, and Paul Duguid. 1991. "Organizational Learning and Communities-of-Practice: Toward a Unified View of Working, Learning, and Innovation." *Organization Science* 2 (1): 40–57.
- Charmaz, Kathy. 2014. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. SAGE.
- Corbin, Juliet, and Anselm Strauss. 2008. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Czarniawska, Barbara. 2007. *Shadowing: And Other Techniques for Doing Fieldwork in Modern Societies*. Malmö: Liber
- Dubois, Vincent. 2010. *The Bureaucrat and the Poor: Encounters in French Welfare Offices*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Ebsen, Frank. 2018. "Decision-Making in Social Work." *Nordic Social Work Research* 8 (1): 1–5.
- Ellis, Kathryn. 2011. "'Street-Level Bureaucracy' Revisited: The Changing Face of Frontline Discretion in Adult Social Care in England." *Social Policy & Administration* 45 (3): 221–44.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. 2nd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Evans, T. 2011. "Professionals, Managers and Discretion: Critiquing Street-Level Bureaucracy." *British Journal of Social Work* 41 (2): 368–86.
- Feldman, Martha S. 2016. "Routines as Process. Past, Present, and Future." In *Organizational Routines: How They Are Created, Maintained, and Changed*, edited by Jennifer Howard-Grenville, Claus Rerup, Ann Langley, and Haridimos Tsoukas. Perspectives on Process Organization Studies. Oxford Scholarship Online: Oxford University Press.
- Feldman, Martha S., and Wanda J. Orlikowski. 2011. "Theorizing Practice and Practicing Theory." *Organization Science* 22 (5): 1240–53.
- Feldman, Martha S., and Brian T. Pentland. 2003. "Reconceptualizing Organizational Routines as a Source of Flexibility and Change." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 48 (1): 94–118.

- Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2011. "Case Study." In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 4th ed., 301–16. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Foldy, Erica Gabrielle, and Tamara R. Buckley. 2010. "Re-Creating Street-Level Practice: The Role of Routines, Work Groups, and Team Learning." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 20 (1): 23–52.
- Forkby, Torbjörn, and Staffan Höjer. 2011. "Navigations between Regulations and Gut Instinct: The Unveiling of Collective Memory in Decision-Making Processes Where Teenagers Are Placed in Residential Care." *Child & Family Social Work* 16 (2): 159–68.
- Forkby, Torbjörn, Staffan Höjer, and Andreas Liljegren. 2016. "Making Sense of Common Sense: Examining the Decision-Making of Politically Appointed Representatives in Swedish Child Protection." *Child & Family Social Work* 21 (1): 14–25.
- Gill, Rebecca, Joshua Barbour, and Marleah Dean. 2014. "Shadowing in/as Work: Ten Recommendations for Shadowing Fieldwork Practice." *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management* 9 (1): 69–89.
- Gofen, Anat. 2014. "Mind the Gap: Dimensions and Influence of Street-Level Divergence." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 24 (2): 473–93.
- Gofen, Anat, Shelly Sella, and Drorit Gassner. 2019. "Levels of Analysis in Street-Level Bureaucracy Research." In Hupe, Peter (ed.) *Research Handbook on Street-Level Bureaucracy: The Ground Floor of Government in Context*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Goldman, Laurie S., and Erica Gabrielle Foldy. 2015. "The Space before Action: The Role of Peer Discussion Groups in Frontline Service Provision." *Social Service Review* 89 (1): 166–202.
- Golia, Geoffrey M., and Amanda R. McGovern. 2015. "If You Save Me, I'll Save You: The Power of Peer Supervision in Clinical Training and Professional Development." *The British Journal of Social Work* 45 (2): 634–50.
- Goodrick, Elizabeth, and Trish Reay. 2011. "Constellations of Institutional Logics: Changes in the Professional Work of Pharmacists." *Work and Occupations* 38 (3): 372–416.
- Guy, Mary E., Meredith A. Newman, and Sharon H. Mastracci. 2014. *Emotional Labor: Putting the Service in Public Service*. Routledge.
- Harris, Rebecca, and Robin Holt. 2013. "Interacting Institutional Logics in General Dental Practice." *Social Science & Medicine* 94 (October): 63–70.
- Harrits, Gitte Sommer. 2019. "Stereotypes in Context: How and When Do Street-Level Bureaucrats Use Class Stereotypes?" *Public Administration Review* 79 (1): 93–103.
- Harrits, Gitte Sommer, and Marie Østergaard Møller. 2014. "Prevention at the Front Line: How Home Nurses, Pedagogues, and Teachers Transform Public Worry into Decisions on Special Efforts." *Public Management Review* 16 (4): 447–80.
- Haverland, Markus, and Dvora Yanow. 2012. "A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Public Administration Research Universe: Surviving Conversations on Methodologies and Methods." *Public Administration Review* 72 (3): 401–408.
- Hestbæk, Anne-Dorthe. 2011. "Denmark - A Child Welfare System Under Reframing." In *Child Protection Systems: International Trends and Orientations*, edited by Neil Gilbert, Nigel Parton, and Marit Skivenes, 131–50. Oxford University Press.
- Hupe, Peter, and Aurélien Buffat. 2014. "A Public Service Gap: Capturing Contexts in a Comparative Approach of Street-Level Bureaucracy." *Public Management Review* 16 (4): 548–69.
- Hupe, Peter, and Michael Hill. 2007. "Street-Level Bureaucracy and Public Accountability." *Public Administration* 85 (2): 279–299.

- . 2019. “Positioning Street-Level Bureaucracy Research.” In Hupe, Peter (ed.) *Research Handbook on Street-Level Bureaucracy: The Ground Floor of Government in Context*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Hupe, Peter, Michael Hill, and Aurélien Buffat. 2016. “Introduction: Defining and Understanding Street-Level Bureaucracy.” In *Understanding Street-Level Bureaucracy*, 3–24. Policy Press.
- Hupe, Peter, and Lael R. Keiser. 2019. “Street-Level Bureaucracy Research and First-Line Supervision.” In Hupe, Peter (ed.) *Research Handbook on Street-Level Bureaucracy: The Ground Floor of Government in Context*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Iversen, Anette Christine, and Kåre Heggen. 2016. “Child Welfare Workers Use of Knowledge in Their Daily Work.” *European Journal of Social Work* 19 (2): 187–203.
- Jensen, Didde Cramer, and Line Bjørnskov Pedersen. 2017. “The Impact of Empathy—Explaining Diversity in Street-Level Decision-Making.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 27 (3): 433–49.
- Jilke, Sebastian, and Lars Tummers. 2018. “Which Clients Are Deserving of Help? A Theoretical Model and Experimental Test.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 28 (2): 226–38.
- Keiser, Lael R. 2010. “Understanding Street-Level Bureaucrats’ Decision Making: Determining Eligibility in the Social Security Disability Program.” *Public Administration Review* 70 (2): 247–57.
- Keulemans, Shelena, and Sandra Groeneveld. 2020. “Supervisory Leadership at the Frontlines: Street-Level Discretion, Supervisor Influence, and Street-Level Bureaucrats’ Attitude Towards Clients.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 30 (2), 307–323.
- Lavee, Einat. 2020. “Who Is in Charge? The Provision of Informal Personal Resources at the Street Level.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, Advance Access, muaa025
- Lavee, Einat, and Roni Strier. 2019. “Transferring Emotional Capital as Coerced Discretion: Street-Level Bureaucrats Reconciling Structural Deficiencies.” *Public Administration* 97, 910–925.
- Lipsky, Michael. 1980. *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. 30th Anniversary Expanded Ed. New York.
- . 2010. *Street-Level Bureaucracy, Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service (30th Ann. Ed.)*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Loon, Nina Mari van, and Mads Leth Jakobsen. 2018. “Connecting Governance and the Front Lines: How Work Pressure and Autonomy Matter for Coping in Different Performance Regimes.” *Public Administration* 96 (3): 435–51.
- Lotta, Gabriela Spanghero, and Eduardo Cesar Marques. 2020. “How Social Networks Affect Policy Implementation: An Analysis of Street-Level Bureaucrats’ Performance Regarding a Health Policy.” *Social Policy & Administration* 54 (3): 345–60.
- Loyens, Kim. 2019. “Networks as Unit of Analysis in Street-Level Bureaucracy Research.” In Hupe, Peter (ed.) *Research Handbook on Street-Level Bureaucracy: The Ground Floor of Government in Context*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- May, Peter, and Soren Winter. 2000. “Reconsidering Styles of Regulatory Enforcement: Patterns in Danish Agro-Environmental Inspection.” *Law & Policy* 22 (2): 143–73.
- Maynard-Moody, Steven, and Michael Musheno. 2000. “State Agent or Citizen Agent: Two Narratives of Discretion.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 10 (2): 329–58.
- . 2003. *Cops, Teachers, Counselors: Stories from the Front Lines of Public Service*. Ann Arbor, US: University of Michigan Press.
- . 2012. “Social Equities and Inequities in Practice: Street-Level Workers as Agents and Pragmatists.” *Public Administration Review* 72 (s1): S16–S23.

- Merriam-Webster.Com Dictionary, s.v. ‘Deliberation.’” n.d. In *Merriam-Webster.Com Dictionary*. Accessed June 26, 2020. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deliberation>.
- Miles, Matthew B., and A. M. Huberman. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Molander, Anders, and Harald Grimen. 2010. “Understanding Professional Discretion.” In *Sociology of Professions: Continental and Anglo-Saxon Traditions*, by Lennart Svensson and Julia Evetts. Göteborg: Daidalos.
- Møller, Anne M. 2019. “Explicit Professionalism. A Cross-Level Study of Institutional Change in the Wake of Evidence-Based Practice.” *Journal of Professions and Organization* 6 (2), 179–195.
- Munro, E., N. Cartwright, J. Hardie, and E. Montuschi. 2017. *Improving Child Safety : Deliberation, Judgement and Empirical Research*. Durham: Centre for Humanities Engaging Science and Society (CHESS).
- Nisar, Muhammad Azfar, and Spiro Maroulis. 2017. “Foundations of Relating: Theory and Evidence on the Formation of Street-Level Bureaucrats’ Workplace Networks.” *Public Administration Review* 77 (6): 829–39.
- Noordegraaf, Mirko. 2015. “Hybrid Professionalism and beyond: (New) Forms of Public Professionalism in Changing Organizational and Societal Contexts.” *Journal of Professions and Organization* 2 (2): 187–206.
- Nowell, Branda, and Kate Albrecht. 2018. “A Reviewer’s Guide to Qualitative Rigor.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, September.
- Oberfield, Zachary W. 2014. *Becoming Bureaucrats: Socialization at the Front Lines of Government Service*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Ospina, Sonia M., Marc Esteve, and Seulki Lee. 2017. “Assessing Qualitative Studies in Public Administration Research.” *Public Administration Review* 78 (4): 593–605.
- Pedersen, Mogens Jin, Justin M. Stritch, and Frederik Thuesen. 2018. “Punishment on the Frontlines of Public Service Delivery: Client Ethnicity and Caseworker Sanctioning Decisions in a Scandinavian Welfare State.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 28 (3): 339–54.
- Pollitt, Christopher. 2012. *New Perspectives on Public Services: Places and Technology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Raaphorst, Nadine. 2018. “How to Prove, How to Interpret and What to Do? Uncertainty Experiences of Street-Level Tax Officials.” *Public Management Review* 20 (4): 485–502.
- Raaphorst, Nadine, and Sandra Groeneveld. 2018. “Double Standards in Frontline Decision Making: A Theoretical and Empirical Exploration.” *Administration & Society* 50 (8): 1175–1201.
- Raaphorst, Nadine, and Kim Loyens. 2018. “From Poker Games to Kitchen Tables: How Social Dynamics Affect Frontline Decision Making.” *Administration & Society*, March.
- Riccucci, Norma. 2005. *How Management Matters: Street-Level Bureaucrats and Welfare Reform*. Public Management and Change. Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press.
- Rosenthal, Patrice, and Riccardo Peccei. 2006. “The Social Construction of Clients by Service Agents in Reformed Welfare Administration.” *Human Relations* 59 (12): 1633–58.
- . 2007. “‘The Work You Want, The Help You Need’: Constructing the Customer in Jobcentre Plus.” *Organization* 14 (2): 201–23.
- Rutz, Suzanne, Dinah Mathew, Paul Robben, and Antoinette de Bont. 2017. “Enhancing Responsiveness and Consistency: Comparing the Collective Use of Discretion and Discretionary Room at Inspectorates in England and the Netherlands.” *Regulation & Governance* 11 (1): 81–94.

- Sandfort, Jodi R. 2000. "Moving Beyond Discretion and Outcomes: Examining Public Management from the Front Lines of the Welfare System." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 10 (4): 729–56.
- Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine, and Dvora Yanow. 2009. "Reading and Writing as Method: In Search of Trustworthy Texts." In *Organizational Ethnography: Studying the Complexities of Everyday Life*, edited by Sierk Ybema, Dvora Yanow, Harry Wels, and Frans H. Kamsteeg, 56–82. Los Angeles ; London: SAGE.
- . 2012. *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*. E-book Version. Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Siciliano, Michael D. 2015. "Professional Networks and Street-Level Performance: How Public School Teachers' Advice Networks Influence Student Performance." *The American Review of Public Administration* 47(1), 79-101.
- Skivenes, Marit, and Milfrid Tonheim. 2015. "Improving the Care Order Decision-Making Processes: Viewpoints of Child Welfare Workers in Four Countries." *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*, December, 1–11.
- Thomann, Eva, Nadine van Engen, and Lars Tummers. 2018. "The Necessity of Discretion: A Behavioral Evaluation of Bottom-Up Implementation Theory." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 28 (4): 583–601.
- Tummers, Lars L. G., and Victor Bekkers. 2014. "Policy Implementation, Street-Level Bureaucracy, and the Importance of Discretion." *Public Management Review* 16 (4): 527–47.
- Tummers, Lars L. G., Victor Bekkers, Evelien Vink, and Michael Musheno. 2015. "Coping During Public Service Delivery: A Conceptualization and Systematic Review of the Literature." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 25 (4): 1099–1126.
- Vinzant, Janet Coble, and Lane Crothers. 1998. *Street-Level Leadership: Discretion and Legitimacy in Front-Line Public Service*. Georgetown University Press.
- Weick, Karl E. 1995. *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Wenger, Etienne. 1999. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Ybema, Sierk, Dvora Yanow, Harry Wels, and Frans H. Kamsteeg, eds. 2009. *Organizational Ethnography: Studying the Complexities of Everyday Life*. Los Angeles ; London: SAGE.
- Zacka, Bernardo. 2017. *When the State Meets the Street: Public Service and Moral Agency*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- . 2019. "Street-Level Bureaucracy and Democratic Theory." In Hupe, Peter (ed.) *Research Handbook on Street-Level Bureaucracy: The Ground Floor of Government in Context*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Zang, Xiaowei, and Michael Musheno. 2017. "Exploring Frontline Work in China." *Public Administration* 95 (3): 842–55.

Appendix 1. Overview of Fieldwork Activities

| Location | Fieldwork Activities |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Agency A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 days of observation, incl. 4 days of shadowing Family Services Coordinator and 3 days of shadowing Casework Coordinator (April-Aug. 2016, Sept. 2016) • Participant observation of training workshop for all caseworkers (Sept. 2016) |
| Agency B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 days of observation, incl. 6 days of shadowing Family Services Coordinator and 5 days of shadowing Casework Coordinator (May 2016, Sept.-Oct. 2016) • Participant observation of educational event (all frontline workers) (June 2016) |
| Agency C | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 days of observation, incl. 4 days of shadowing Casework Coordinator (Oct. 2015, Dec. 2015, Sept. 2016; shadowing conducted during September visit) • Participant observation of ‘Evidence Fair’ in the City Hall (Sept. 2016) • Several phone conversations w/chief consultant (Sep. 2015-Dec. 2016) |
| All agencies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explorative interviews and meetings to negotiate access (Aug. 2015, Oct. 2015, Feb. 2016) • Participant observation of daily activities, incl. meetings with other coordinators, managers, team meetings, individual case reviews, and ad hoc supervision • Participant observation of informal activities and conversations, e.g. during lunch, smoking breaks, and walk-and-talks between meetings • Informal interviews/conversations with frontline workers, coordinators, supervisors and district managers • Collection of documents, check lists, standardized forms, and other artefacts • 29 planned semi-structured individual and group interviews (19 in Crocusville Municipality (Agency A + B), 10 in Heatherhill Municipality (Agency C)). |

Appendix 2. Participants' Roles and Responsibilities

| Job title | Role and responsibilities |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Caseworker | Carry out investigations, design action plans, and monitor progress. Typically hold professional degrees in social work. |
| Family therapist | Deliver preventive services, assess progress. Some are psychologists, others hold professional degrees in, e.g., pedagogy, ergo therapy, and additional certifications. |
| Coordinators/ Team Leaders | Coordinate and supervise teams of caseworkers or family therapists, ensure adherence to legal frameworks, organizational standards, and professional knowledge in collaboration with first-line supervisors. Sometimes directly involved in cases. Limited or no formal responsibility for personnel issues. Experienced professionals, some hold an additional academic degree. |
| First-Line Supervisor | Responsible for all teams within a unit, e.g., all caseworkers or all family therapists in the agency. Experienced professionals, some hold an additional academic degree. |
| District manager | Managerial responsibility for the local agency as a whole. Answers to the Agency Director. Professional and/or academic background. |
| Development consultant | Responsible for planning and implementing professional development strategies across local agencies/districts. Professional or academic background. |
| Agency director | Managerial responsibility for the entire agency. Answers to the Director of Social Services, who answers to the City Council. |

Appendix 3. Overview of analytical process

