Utdrag ur: Street-Level Bureaucracy (2010), Michael Lipsky

Följande text är tagen ur Michael Liskys "Street-level bureaucracy: dilemmas of the individual in public services" från 2010 som en del av Framåt kamraters transstudiecirkel.

Boken behandlar vad Lipsky kallar "Street level bureaucrats" - den breda grupp arbetare med uppdrag att möta allmänheten och omvandla policier till någon form av praktik, vare sig det handlar om socialsekreterare, tågvärdar, poliser, lärare, läkare, eller i vårat fall, utredningspersonal inom transvården - och hur strukturerna de jobbar inom färgar deras arbete, självuppfattning och syn på personerna de har i uppdrag att hjälpa.

Då boken är närmare 300 sidor, och innehåller många exempel och mycket repetition, har vi valt att utgå från detta nedklippta format istället för att ange kapitel.

1. What is a street-level bureaucrat?

1.1 Definition

Public service workers currently occupy a critical position in American society. Although they are normally regarded as low-level employees, the actions of most public service workers actually constitute the services "delivered" by government. Moreover, when taken together the individual decisions of these workers become, or add up to, agency policy. Whether government policy is to deliver "goods" - such as welfare or public housing or to confer status - such as "criminal" or "mentally ill"-the discretionary actions of public employees are the benefits and sanctions of government programs or determine access to government rights and benefits. Most citizens encounter government (if they encounter it at all) not through letters to congressmen or by attendance at school board meetings but through their teachers and their children's teachers and through the policeman on the comer or in the patrol car. Each encounter of this kind represents an instance of policy delivery. Public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work are called street-level bureaucrats in this study. Public service agencies that employ a significant number of street-level bureaucrats in proportion to their work force are called street-level bureaucracies. Typical street-level bureaucrats are teachers, police officers and other law enforcement personnel, social workers, judges, public lawyers and other court officers, health workers, and many other public employees who grant access to government programs and provide services within them. People who work in these jobs tend to have much in common because they experience analytically similar work conditions.

The policy delivered by street-level bureaucrats is most often immediate and personal. They usually make decisions on the spot (although sometimes they try not to) and their determinations are focused entirely on the individual. In contrast, an urban renewal program might destroy a neighborhood and replace and substitute new housing and different people, but the policy was prolonged, had many different stages, and was usually played out in arenas far removed from the

daily life of neighborhood residents. The decisions of street-level bureaucrats tend to be redistributive as well as allocative. [...] In another sense, in delivering policy street-level bureaucrats make decisions about people that affect their life chances. To designate or treat someone as a welfare recipient, a juvenile delinquent, or a high achiever affects the relationships of others to that person and also affects the person's self evaluation. Thus begins (or continues) the social process that we infer accounts for so many self-fulfilling prophecies. The child judged to be a juvenile delinquent develops such a self-image and is grouped with other "delinquents," increasing the chances that he or she will adopt the behavior thought to have been incipient in the first place. Children thought by their teacher to be richly endowed in learning ability learn more than peers of equal intelligence who were not thought to be superior. Welfare recipients find or accept housing inferior to those with equal disposable incomes who are not recipients.

A defining facet of the working environment of street-level bureaucrats is that they must deal with clients' personal reactions to their decisions, however they cope with their implications. To say that people's self-evaluation is affected by the actions of street-level bureaucrats is to say that people are reactive to the policy. This is not exclusively confined to subconscious processes. Clients of street-level bureaucracies respond angrily to real or perceived injustices, develop strategies to ingratiate themselves with workers, act grateful and elated or sullen and passive in reaction to street-level bureaucrats' decisions. It is one thing to be treated neglectfully and routinely by the telephone company, the motor vehicle bureau, or other government agencies whose agents know nothing of the personal circumstances surrounding a· claim or request. It is quite another thing to be shuffled, categorized, and treated "bureaucratically," (in the pejorative sense), by someone to whom one is directly talking and from whom one expects at least an open and sympathetic hearing. In short, the reality of the work of street-level bureaucrats could hardly be farther from the bureaucratic ideal of impersonal detachment in decision making. On the contrary, in street-level bureaucracies the objects of critical decisions-people-actually change as a result of the decisions.

While people may experience these bureaucracies as individuals, schools, precinct houses, or neighborhood clinics are places where policy about individuals is organized collectively. These administrative arrangements suggest to citizens the possibility that controlling, or at least affecting, their structures will influence the quality of individual treatment. Thus we have two preconditions for successful community organization efforts: the hope and plausibility that individual benefits may accrue to those taking part in group action and a visible, accessible, and blamable collective target. Community action focused on street-level bureaucracies is also apparently motivated by concerns for community character. The dominant institutions in communities help shape community identity. They may be responsive to the dominant community group (this has been the traditional role of high schools in Boston) or they may be unresponsive and opposed to conceptions of community and identity favored by residents, as in the case of schools that neglect the Spanish heritage of a significant minority. Whether people are motivated by specific grievances or more diffuse concerns that become directed at community institutions, their focus in protesting the actions of street-level bureaucracies may be attributed to the familiarity of the agency, its critical role in community welfare, and a perception at some level that these institutions are not sufficiently accountable to the people they serve.

Finally, street-level bureaucrats play a critical role in regulating the degree of contemporary conflict by virtue of their role as agents of social control. Citizens who receive public benefits interact with public agents who require certain behaviors of them. They must anticipate the requirements of these public agents and claimants must tailor their actions and develop "suitable" attitudes both toward the services they receive and toward the street-level bureaucrats themselves. Teachers convey and enforce expectations of proper attitudes toward schooling, self, and efficacy in other interactions. Policemen convey expectations about public behavior and authority. Social workers convey expectations about public benefits and the status of recipients.

1.2 What aspects shape their work?

Unlike lower-level workers in most organizations, street-level bureaucrats have considerable discretion in determining the nature, amount, and quality of benefits and sanctions provided by their agencies. [...] This is not to say that street-level workers are unrestrained by rules, regulations, and directives from above, or by the norms and practices of their occupational group. On the contrary, the major dimensions of public policy levels of benefits, categories of eligibility, nature of rules, regulations and services-are shaped by policy elites and political and administrative officials. Administrators and occupational and community norms also structure policy choices of street-level bureaucrats. These influences establish the major dimensions of street-level policy and account for the degree of standardization that exists in public programs from place to place as well as in local programs.

Earlier in this volume I observed that the actions of teachers, police officers, or welfare workers "become, or add up to, agency policy," and that their actions effectively "become the public policies they carry out." For a great many of the readers of the original edition, these conclusions were the primary and sometimes the only lesson of Street-Level Bureaucracy. This interpretation is clearly too limited. Street-level bureaucrats may indeed "make" policy in the sense that their separate discretionary and unsanctioned behaviors add up to patterned agency behavior overall. But they do so only in the context of broad policy structures of which their decisions are a part. Street-level bureaucrats do not articulate core objectives or themselves develop mechanisms to achieve them. For any given public agency or any policy reform, we need to look into the entire policy environment in which street-level bureaucrats function.

The persistence of rigid and unresponsive patterns of behavior results from street-level bureaucrats' substantial discretion, exercised in a particular work context. Like other policy makers, they operate in an environment that conditions the way they perceive problems and frame solutions to them. The work environment of street-level bureaucrats is structured by common conditions that give rise to common patterns of practice and affect the direction these patterns take. By definition, street-level bureaucrats work at jobs characterized by relatively high degrees of discretion and regular interaction with citizens. Ordinarily, they also experience the following conditions in their work.

1.2.1 Resources are chronically inadequate relative to the tasks workers are asked to perform.

Bureaucratic decision making takes place under conditions of limited time and information. Decision makers typically are constrained by the costs of obtaining information relative to their resources, by their capacity to absorb information, and by the unavailability of information. However, street-level bureaucrats work with a relatively high degree of uncertainty because of the complexity of the subject matter (people) and the frequency or rapidity with which decisions have to be made. Not only is reliable information costly and difficult to obtain but for street-level bureaucrats high case loads, episodic encounters, and the constant press of decisions force them to act without even being able to consider whether an investment in searching for more information would be profitable.

Street-level bureaucrats characteristically have very large case loads relative to their responsibilities. The actual numbers are less important than the fact that they typically cannot fulfill their mandated responsibilities with such case loads. [...] There are other organizational factors that affect the work of street-level bureaucrats. An emphasis on housekeeping chores, such as filling out

forms or drawing up lesson plans, affects the amount of time available to clients. [...] Street-level bureaucrats may also lack personal resources in conducting their work. They may be under-trained or inexperienced. [...] Some jobs just cannot be done properly, given the ambiguity of goals and the technology of particular social services.

1.2.2. The demand for services tends to increase to meet the supply.

A distinct characteristic of the work setting of street-level bureaucrats is that the demand for services tends to increase to meet the supply. If additional services are made available, demand will increase to consume them. If more resources are made available, pressures for additional services utilizing those resources will be forthcoming. The analogy to the development of traffic patterns on the Long Island Expressway is compelling. In the name of relieving congestion during rush hours on this infamous highway, traffic engineers added additional lanes. But every additional lane, while marginally decreasing driving time to New York City, induced more people to use the road. This additional traffic restored the traffic jam that the new lanes had been designed to correct. Utilization increased to meet the supply of road space until commuting time reached the previous level. A new equilibrium was restored with the same degree of congestion during rush hours, although with a higher volume of traffic.

It has often been observed that utilization increases when public services are expanded. [...] The proposition that demand will increase to meet the supply applies qualitatively as well as quantitatively. If there were a fixed clientele (we have just argued there is not) clients would still demand more and improved services, as the population has done historically.

When street-level bureaucracies do experience declining demand because of population shifts and uneven age distributions, they encounter different but equal difficulties in relieving case-load pressures. Consolidation or force reductions tend to be administered so as to retain high individual case loads. Relieving case-load pressure may not directly translate into acceptable bureaucratic behavior. In particular, marginal reductions in case load cannot be expected to result in visible improvements in practice. For example, one would not expect teachers to differ substantially in the way they handle disciplinary problems simply because their class sizes are reduced from thirty to twenty-five.

With limited resources it might be desirable to add specialists rather than relieve all classes equally. Yet the problem remains that the burden on general classroom teachers would not be ameliorated. This is not to condemn such developments, but only to raise the question whether even substantial increases in public personnel budgets can reduce the work-load pressures enough to make a difference in the way clients are processed if other conditions of work remain the same.

A complication in providing service through street-level bureaucracies comes about because the demand for service is sometimes unpredictable. People who use or claim services cannot be counted upon to time their needs to the exigencies of bureaucratic allocations. [...] It is possible that an exceptionally affluent street-level bureaucracy might be able to handle unpredictable demands for service and provide superior service during off-peak periods. But it is more likely that unpredictability combines with pressing demand to impose considerable costs on the provision of service. Workers may despair of ever catching up or otherwise getting out from under the pressing burden of work.

This analysis of the demand-supply dilemma should not be taken as counsel of despair. Public policy always requires consideration of the trade-offs involved in providing additional resources for

added benefits and incurring additional costs. With added resources more people can be served, just as more people can get to New York City from Long Island, although under stressful conditions, by using an expanded Long Island Expressway. But appreciation of the demand-supply dilemma in street-level bureaucracies does suggest that the problem of the quality of service delivery is not likely to yield easily to any imaginable resource increments. Other things being equal, increased capacity results in reproducing the level of service quality at a higher volume for any imaginable increase in resource availability. This proposition is critical because it explains why the steady increase in resources available to street-level bureaucracies in recent years has not resulted in improvements in the perceived quality of client treatment. (Other reasons include the fact that salary raises, which consume increases in agency resource allocations, do not increase resources available to clients, although they may help to maintain staff quality.) Further, it contradicts many often self-serving perspectives on reform, which hold that additional personnel are the most important ingredients in responding adequately to citizen complaints.

1.2.3. Goal expectations for the agencies in which they work tend to be ambiguous, vague, or conflicting.

Street-level bureaucrats characteristically work in jobs with conflicting and ambiguous goals. Is the role of the police to maintain order or to enforce the law? Is the role of public education to communicate social values, teach basic skills, or meet the needs of employers for a trained work force? Are the goals of public welfare to provide income support or decrease dependency? [...] Public service goals also tend to have an idealized dimension that make them difficult to achieve and confusing and complicated to approach. Goals such as good health, equal justice, and public education, are indeed, as Martin Landau has observed, "more like receding horizons than fixed targets."

Agency goals may be ambiguous because the conflicts that existed when programs were orginally developed were submerged. A typical mechanism of legislative conflict resolution is to pass on intractable conflicts for resolution (or continued irresolution) at the administrative level. [...] Agency goals also may be ambiguous because they have accumulated by accretion and have never been rationalized, and it remains functional for the agency not to confront its goal conflicts. Goal conflict in welfare policy persists not because analysts are unaware of ambiguity, but because there is such fundamental disagreement among constituents of welfare policy that Congress has never been willing to address and resolve the conflict directly.

Another major source of ambiguity may be found in the uncertainty of social service technologies. When there are uncertainties over what will or will not work, there is greater room for admitting and tolerating a variety of approaches and objectives. In such a situation there is often a hunger for discovering successful techniques and an apparent willingness to modify objectives to suit the techniques.

If goal conflict in street-level bureaucracies is fairly clear-cut (rather than ambiguous), the conflicts characteristically have three sources.

1.2.3.1. Client-centered goals conflict with social engineering goals.

At times client-centered goals primarily support social engineering functions because of the symbolic importance of client centeredness. Street-level bureaucracies seek to gain client compliance either through the control of resources that the client desires (utilitarian compliance) or, as in the case of police and prisons, through force or the threat of force (coercive compliance).

However, it is characteristic of a liberal society to show deference to the norm of respect for the individual. Institutions are given license to organize and manipulate individuals only if they properly defer to this norm. This is simultaneously a normative prescription for behavior and a dominant element in social control. [...] Although courts process people quickly, often with little time for complete hearings on the merits of cases, rhetoric of guarantees for the "rights of the accused" and the proposition that defendants are "innocent until proven guilty" are powerful supports for a bureaucratized court system regardless whether those injunctions protect defendants from injustice.

1.2.3.2. Client-centered goals conflict with organization-centered goals.

The ability of street-level bureaucrats to treat people as individuals is significantly compromised by the needs of the organization to process work quickly using the resources-at its disposal. The fundamental service dilemma of street-level bureaucracies is how to provide individual responses or treatment on a mass basis. [...] The study of street-level bureaucrats may be seen as a study in goal displacement when the norm of individual client orientation becomes subordinate to the needs for mass processing. The typical conflicts here are individual client treatment versus routinization and mass processing, and response to the needs of individual clients versus efficient agency performances.

These dilemmas are related to the public nature of the programs. Just as agencies distributing free goods must develop mechanisms to ration their allocation, political systems must place limits on the demands that organizations can make for additional resources. If, indeed, demand will increase to equal the supply then the inherent impulses organizations display toward growth will lead to increasing organizational scope even though, as suggested above, the quality of service cannot be expected to improve with growth.

Constant harping on the error rate in public welfare or allegations of doctor abuses of medicare claims serve to remind the public and the agencies in charge of these programs that uncontrolled growth in government spending is not officially acceptable. Thus, except in rare instances, such as a new service program in search of a clientele, street-level bureaucracies are under continuous pressure to realize the public objectives of efficiency and cost effectiveness. Pressures will be more or less explicitly articulated depending upon the political climate and a variety of other factors.

1.2.3.3. Goals conflict because street-level bureaucrats' role expectations are communicated generally through multiple conflicting reference groups.

Generally role theorists locate the origin of role expectations in three sources: in peers and others who occupy complementary role positions; in reference groups, in terms of which expectations are defined although they are not literally present; and in public expectations where consensus about role expectations can sometimes be found. To the extent that these. sources of role expectations differ significantly one would expect street-level bureaucrats to encounter role conflict and ambiguity (note that goals are one dimension of role construct). There are at least three ways in which the complicated structure of street level bureaucrats' role expectations contributes to goal ambiguity and conflict.

First, to the extent that public expectations affect street-level bureaucrats there is often considerable disagreement about what street-level bureaucracies should primarily do. Street-level bureaucrats within limits may define the ways in which they will pursue their objectives. But often community opinion is diffusely apprehended, creating role conflict. [...] To the extent that communities are

indifferent to the nature of bureaucratic policy or fail to express their views in politically salient ways, street-level bureaucracies will perform with internally generated objectives. Conversely, the stronger community sentiment is concerning proper bureaucratic behavior, the more street-level bureaucracies will respond to community orientations. The more heterogeneous community sentiments are, however, the more street-level bureaucracies will experience goal conflict.

A second dimension of role conflict or ambiguity stems from the significant role of peer groups in establishing role expectations. For street-level bureaucrats, peers are fellow workers (although generally peers can be otherwise, e.g., social peers, family peers, etc.). Only work peers fully appreciate the pressures of work and the extent to which street-level bureaucrats experience the need to have goal orientations that are consistent with resolving work pressures. The greater the strain between various goal expectations, and the smaller the zone of indifference in which street-level bureaucrats operate, the more peer support is critical for sustaining workers' morale.

A third dimension of the construction of street-level bureaucrats' role expectations concerns the role of clients. Clients are not a primary reference group of street-level bureaucrats. They do not count among the groups that primarily define street-level bureaucrats' roles. This is not to say that children are unimportant to teachers or that litigants and defendants are unimportant to judges. But these people do not primarily or even secondarily determine bureaucratic role expectations. Work-related peer groups, work-related or professionally related standards, and public expectations generally are much more significant in determining role behavior. Recognizing their weak influence in defining workers' roles, some client organizations have demanded inclusion in the constellation of bureaucratic reference groups.

1.2.4. Performance oriented toward goal achievement tends to be difficult if not impossible to measure.

Job performance in street-level bureaucracies is extremely difficult to measure. The many implications of this statement include the facts that these agencies are not self-corrective, and the definition of adequate performance is highly politicized. For some purposes bureaucracy itself may be defined in part as a large organization whose output cannot be evaluated through market transactions. [...] While in theory a market-oriented organization can learn when it is succeeding or failing through the inexorable realities of profit and loss, bureaucracies receive no similar messages. Hence the measurement and evaluation of performance-the governance of performance-is critical.

When the output consists of services provided or the validity of discretionary decisions made, it is extremely difficult to oversee or scrutinize these decisions if standards of quality are at issue. [...] As we have seen, there is no agreement in society about objectives of public education and public safety forces. How then to operationalize ambiguous objectives? [...] Still another reason that street-level bureaucrats' performance often eludes effective evaluation is that there are too many variables to take into account to make evaluation realistic. It is not only that human beings are complex and that a metric of correct responses is inappropriate. Equally important, there is rarely any way to determine on a regular basis what would have happened to clients in the absence of intervention.

To some degree public deference to street-level bureaucrats' autonomy in decision making is also characteristic. This deference is a defining aspect of professionalism and has some applicability in all the areas in which street-level bureaucrats work. [...] Whatever the sources of this freedom, it contributes in itself to the problems of measuring performance, particularly since peer evaluation is one of the ways to achieve accountability in work quality.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, however, bureaucracies do establish standards and measure workers' performances against these standards.[...] But these measures are only problematically related to public safety, or to clients' ability to cope with problems that are in part the objectives of these interactions. And they have nothing to do with the appropriateness of workers' actions, or the fairness with which they were made, the net results of which determine the rates on which workers are judged. Not only are such standards problematically related to goals, but it is not even apparent whether measured increases or decreases signal better or worse performance.

Organizations tend to measure what they can readily quantify without intruding on workers' interaction with clients. Organizational attention focuses on two major considerations. First, a great deal of attention is paid to the way the worker spends his or her time. [...] Organizations may develop surrogate indicators of performance and quality, but workers accommodate themselves to these measures and remain independent of organizational control. [...] Street-level bureaucracies attempt to promote the validity of surrogate measures to the general public in an effort to appear accountable through performance standards. Although they currently make great efforts to develop information systems to give the impression that they actively seek to increase productivity, there are really few valid statistics where the quality of performance is at issue.

Despite the difficulties of performance measurement, street-level bureaucracies do seize on some aspects of performance to measure. They tend to seek reports on what can be measured as a means of exercising control. In tum, the behavior of workers comes to reflect the incentives and sanctions implicit in those measurements. The relationship between performance measures and behavior was perhaps first highlighted by sociologist Peter Blau when he observed that when the employment agency he was studying began to be evaluated in terms of its placement rate, employment counselors shifted the focus of their work to the more easily employed at the expense of those more difficult to place. This illustrates the general rule that behavior in organizations tends to drift toward compatibility with the ways the organization is evaluated.

1.2.5. Clients are typically non-voluntary; partly as a result, clients for the most part do not serve as primary bureaucratic reference groups.

Clients in street-level bureaucracies are non-voluntary. This point is obvious in coercive public agencies such as police departments, but it also applies when the coercive dimensions of the relationship between the agency and the client are less clear. This is because street-level bureaucracies often supply essential services which citizens cannot obtain elsewhere. Government agencies may have a monopoly on the service, clients may not be able to afford private services, or they may not have ready access to them. Potential welfare recipients in a sense "volunteer" to apply for welfare, for example, but their participation in the welfare system is hardly voluntary if they have no income alternatives. Where government does not monopolize an essential service it often provides the only such service available to the poor. Health care and legal services, for example, can be obtained privately but only at relatively high cost. The cost of obtaining private assistance in these areas is so great, relative to income, that poor people are forced to seek assistance through public agencies or not to seek assistance at all. The poorer the person, the more he or she is likely to be the non-voluntary client of not one but several street-level bureaucracies.

If street-level bureaucracies have non-voluntary clients then they cannot be disciplined by those clients. Street-level bureaucracies usually have nothing to lose by failing to satisfy clients. They will try to manage a large volume of complaints and undoubtedly seek to minimize the extent to which they are perceived as difficult to deal with or unresponsive. But managing complaints successfully is a far cry from changing policy in response to consumer dissatisfaction. Yet, as indicated in the previous chapter, receiving complaints and correcting policy in response to them is one of the few

ways organizations can learn from clients. Sometimes street-level bureaucracies are even rewarded for reducing their clientele. [...] At other times street-level bureaucracies are indifferent to the loss of clients or client dissatisfaction. Partly this is due to a proposition developed earlier. If demand for services is practically inexhaustible relative to supply, then the fact that some clients are disaffected by the quality or level of service means only that their places are taken by others who need the service and are willing to accept the costs of seeking it.

Where both parties are free to continue the interaction or leave it, participants will set limits to the costs they will accept before ending the relationship. If the encounter is instrumental, that is, if each participant wants something from the other, they will continue to pursue their objectives within the relationship so long as they value the objectives more than the cost of seeking them. This permits a wide range of implicit bargaining tactics, particularly if both parties have a stake in maintaining the relationship. However, if one of the parties does not enter the relationship voluntarily or must sustain the relationship because a highly desired good for which there is no alternative is controlled by the other person in the encounter, the nature of the interaction changes. The costs that the non-voluntary person in the interaction will sustain become much higher. Indeed, the less voluntary the interaction, the less useful it is even to understand the interaction in terms of limits to the costs people will accept, because clients cannot easily withdraw. Street-level bureaucrats can impose costs of personal abuse, neglectful treatment, or inconvenience without necessarily paying the normal penalty of having the other party retaliate. When medical personnel refer to patients as "garbage," "scum," "liars," "deadbeats," and so forth, there is a temptation to say that this is a reaction to the moral superiority they feel over lower class people. However, neglect and abuse of patients is a function of the non-voluntary nature of the association of clients with patients, and not strictly of bureaucracy or class discrepancies.

The non-voluntary nature of clients helps explain why they are not among street-level bureaucrats' primary reference groups [...] The fact that many street-level bureaucrats provide client services or are required to interact with clients in a helpful manner in no way implies that they think that clients should have a say in the nature of street-level practice. Indeed, the organizations that collectively articulate the perspective of street-level bureaucrats, such as teachers' and patrolmen's associations, have fought vigorously to keep their arenas free from citizen involvement.

But this does not mean that clients are helpless in the relationship. Street-level bureaucrats in a sense are also dependent upon clients. Clients have a stock of resources and thus can impose a variety of low-level costs. This is because street-level bureaucrats must obtain client compliance with their decisions, particularly when they are evaluated in terms of clients' behavior or performance. [...] If one party seeks to control the other, the second party may increase the costs of the first party gaining or exercising control, even if the first is unquestionably more powerful. This observation, which has universal applicability from guerrilla warfare to concentration camps, takes particular shape in street-level bureaucracies in several respects.

First, street-level bureaucrats characteristically are pressed with heavy case loads and demands for quick decisions, so that clients can impose salient costs merely by taking workers' time. Since time may be fairly cheap for clients, or their needs high relative to the value they place on their time, clients potentially have a store of resources with which to affect their relationships with street-level bureaucrats.

Second, street-level bureaucrats are characteristically constrained in the resources they can employ in obtaining client compliance. These constraints consist of professional and bureaucratic standards of fairness and due process that to some degree place limits on what can or cannot be done to or with clients (notwithstanding the most outrageous tales of exceptions to the contrary). They are also constrained by social norms of proper behavior toward other people and by recognition that power

should be accompanied by responsibility, particularly when clients are identifiably (indeed defined as) socially or economically needy. This point is emphasized not because street-level bureaucrats are absolutely constrained from abusing their positions, but because what needs to be explained is the mobilization of control in combination with constraints against excessive manifestations of power. Modern bureaucracies which are too heavy-handed lose their legitimacy if their offenses are publicized. Moreover, they are ultimately inefficient if they require significant force to assure adequate client control.

Third, there is an extent to which clients' satisfaction or performance is important to street-level bureaucrats. Successful intervention, expressions of gratitude, and changes in behavior in the desired direction are valued by street-level workers whether or not these developments are reasonably attributable to their work. Clients sometimes manipulate the gratification received by street-level bureaucrats in order to affect future interactions. Client strategies include passivity and acquiescence, expressions of empathy with workers' problems, and humble acceptance of their own responsibility for their situation. The disadvantaged position of clients forces them to conspire in their own management in order to avoid offending the workers or providing negative evidence about their character. In some circumstances clients can effectively express anger or demand their rights, but these strategies appear useful only in certain circumstances and usually not for long.

While a client has some resources with which to affect a relationship with street-level bureaucrats, the relationship is by no means a balanced one. It is a relationship of "unidirectional" power in which "the capacity to make and carry out decisions is the exclusive, or near exclusive, property of one of the ... groups." The relationship is primarily determined by the priorities and preferences of street-level bureaucrats, but the character and terms of the relationship are substantially affected by the limits of the job.

For the most part, except in the more coercive bureaucracies, clients give their consent because (sometimes in combination) they accept the legitimacy of the street-level bureaucrats' position and decision, anticipate that dissent would not be productive, or consider themselves favored by the decision or action taken. Most encounters with bureaucracy appear to be characterized by the consent of clients, but the structure of choices available to clients limits the range of alternative behaviors that they consider realistically available. In short, clients' consent is continuously being managed by public agencies. Street-level bureaucrats are not required to command. Clients control themselves in response to the superior power of the workers. This is not to suggest that clients are docile because swift retaliation would result from noncompliant behavior. Rather, compliance in most street-level bureaucracies may be said to result from the superior position of the workers, their control over desired benefits, and their potential capacity to deny benefits or make their pursuit more costly. Compliance also results from the milieu, which comprehensively cues clients concerning behavioral expectations.

Nonetheless, street-level bureaucrats sometimes do display behavior that strongly suggests this inference is warranted. Street-level bureaucrats indeed reprimand or otherwise sanction deviance from acceptable standards of client behavior. They dominate their interactions with clients. They cue and otherwise teach clients to behave "properly." They structure work patterns to maximize control over clients independent of any policy objectives.

An important problem of public bureaucracies generally and street-level bureaucracies particularly is that clients do not receive the kind of information that would permit them to compare or assess their treatment. Nor can they compare the treatment they receive this year with the treatment extended to clients in other years, or compare the performance of their agency with similar agencies elsewhere. Citizens in general and poor people in particular will resign themselves to inferior levels of service if they have nothing with which to compare their experiences and have no basis for

thinking that they deserve any better. Their frame of reference, if any, is experiential. But the isolation of most clients from each other makes it difficult to interpret experiences effectively and makes clients highly subject to street-level bureaucrats' definition of their situation.

1.3. Alienation

To deliver street-level policy through bureaucracy is to embrace a contradiction. On the one hand, service is delivered by people to people, invoking a model of human interaction, caring, and responsibility. On the other hand, service is delivered through a bureaucracy, invoking a model of detachment and equal treatment under conditions of resource limitations and constraints, making care and responsibility conditional. [...] The helping orientation of street-level bureaucrats is incompatible with their need to judge and control clients for bureaucratic purposes. This is evident in the following role tensions.

First, advocacy can only be done on behalf of single units, whether they be individuals or collectivities such as a tenants' union. Moreover, the advocate must have enough free attention to devote to the client. This does not mean that only one client can be dealt with at a time. But it does mean that advocacy may be compromised by large case loads and mass processing of clients. For the advocate, large case loads mean that every minute devoted to one client means less time for others. Clearly organizations have to choose what resources to provide, and a suboptimal amount is likely to be available for any client. Street-level bureaucracies chronically tend to allocate relatively low amounts of resources to facilitate workers taking clients' perspectives.

Second, advocacy is incompatible with organizational perspectives. The organization hoards resources; the advocate seeks their dispersal to clients. The organization imposes tight control over resource dispersal if it can; the advocate seeks to utilize loopholes and discretionary provisions to gain client benefits. The organization seeks to treat all clients equally and to avoid having to respond to claims that others received special treatment; the advocate seeks to secure special treatment for individual clients. The organization acts as if available resource categories had fixed limits (which is often not absolutely true); the advocate acts as if resources were limitless (which is alsolutely true); the advocate acts as if resources were limitless (which is also not true).

Third, advocacy is incompatible with controlling clients. Street-level bureaucrats usually must make judgments about clients on matters unrelated to appropriate service. They must as well make judgments about credibility, eligibility, and performance. [...] Since these are human interactions that are the subjects of judgment, street-level bureaucrats are not free to give themselves unreservedly to clients. They feel the need to make sure that they do not lose control, respect, advantage, or face, or otherwise fail to perform as required by their role. Street-level bureaucrats may attempt to do a good job, but it will be a job tempered by the other psychological and role requirements placed upon them.

Fourth, advocacy is incompatible with the responsibility of street-level bureaucrats to prepare clients for presentation to other workers or other bureaucracies. One of the most substantial checks on workers who deal with clients is the social and other pressures that arise from the fact that a client is later seen and processed by still other workers or is presented to outsiders. To be sure there are norms against peer criticism in some areas, such as medicine, but pressures exerted by the anticipation that others will observe the work are nonetheless substantial.

the compromises required of advocates reduce the extent to which street-level bureaucrats are able to respond to clients in a fully human way. [...] In defense of the myth of altruism, street-level bureaucracies devote a relatively high proportion of energies to concealing lack of service and

generating appearances of responsiveness. [...] Alienated work leads to dissatisfaction with the job. Job dissatisfaction affects commitment to clients and to the agencies for which they work. The proposition that street-level bureaucrats perform in alienated labor roles contributes to understanding the dynamics of some recent developments in public service organization.

2. How do their circumstances shape their praxis?

We can now restate the problem of street-level bureaucracy as follows. Street-level bureaucrats attempt to do a good job in some way. The job, however, is in a sense impossible to do in ideal terms. How is the job to be accomplished with inadequate resources, few controls, indeterminate objectives, and discouraging circumstances?

There are three general responses that street-level bureaucrats develop to deal with this indeterminacy. First, they develop patterns of practice that tend to limit demand, maximize the utilization of available resources, and obtain client compliance over and above the procedures developed by their agencies. They organize their work to derive a solution within the resource constraints they encounter. Second, they modify their concept of their jobs, so as to lower or otherwise restrict their objectives and thus reduce the gap between available resources and achieving objectives. Third, they modify their concept of the raw materials with which they work- their clients-so as to make more acceptable the gap between accomplishments and objectives. Much of the patterned behavior of street-level bureaucrats, and many of their characteristic subjective orientations, may be understood as responses to the street-level bureaucracy problem.

2.1. Praxis

2.1.1. Reduce complexity & routinization

The existential problem for street-level bureaucrats is that with any single client they probably could interact flexibly and responsively. But if they did this with too many clients their capacity to respond flexibly would disappear. One might think of each client as, in a sense, seeking to be the one or among the few for whom an exception is made, a favor done, an indiscretion overlooked, a regulation ignored.

When confronted with the dilemma of serving more clients or maintaining high quality service, most public managers will experience great pressures to choose in favor of greater numbers at the expense of quality. Their inability to measure and demonstrate the value of a service, when combined with high demand and budgetary concerns, will tend to impose a logic of increasing the quantity of services at the expense of the degree of attention workers can give to individual clients. Street-level bureaucrats, however, may devise ways to sabotage management efforts to reduce interactions with clients. The costs of achieving compliance in the face of workers' resistance may sometimes be more than managers want to pay. [...] Whether street-level bureaucrats oppose efforts to limit their interaction with clients, or whether they accept and encourage such efforts as a way of salvaging an unattractive or deteriorating work situation, is perhaps the critical question on which the quality of public service ultimately depends. Although street-level bureaucrats may sometimes struggle to maintain their ability to treat clients individually, the pressures more often operate in the opposite direction. Street-level practice often reduces the demand for services through rationing. The familiar complaints of encountering "red tape," "being given the run-around," and "talking to a

brick wall" are reminders that clients recognize the extent to which bureaucratic unresponsiveness penalizes them.

In everyday life people seek to simplify their tasks and narrow their range of perceptions in order to process the information they receive and develop responses to it. They create routines to make tasks manageable. They mentally simplify the objects of perception to reduce the complexity of evaluation. They structure their environments to make tasks and perceptions more familiar, less unique. Routines and simplifications aid the management of complexity; environmental structuring limits the complexity to be managed. [...] The development of simplifications, as mental routinization, predictably characterizes bureaucrats whose work involves processing the objects of bureaucratic attention. At the organizational level bureaucracies officially recognize simplifying cues, such as eligibility requirements, in order to regularize decision processes. However, bureaucrats also develop their own patterns of simplification when the official categories prove inadequate for expeditious work processing, or if they significantly contradict their preferences.

Routinization rations services in at least two ways. First, set procedures designed to insure regularity, accountability, and fairness also protect workers from client demands for responsiveness. They insulate workers from having to deal with the human dimensions of presenting situations. They do this partly by creating procedures to which workers defer, happily or unhappily. [...] Second, routines provide a legitimate excuse for not dealing flexibly, since fairness in a limited sense demands equal treatment. Unresponsiveness and inflexibility reinforce common beliefs already present that bureaucracy is part of the problem rather than the solution, and they further reduce clients' claims for service or assertions of need. When routines lead to predictability they may promote a degree of client confidence. [...] But agency practices do not always lead to predictability. When they lead to delay, confusion, and uncertainty they assign considerable costs to clients. At times routines established to protect clients are distorted to minimize contact or services.

The significance of practices that subvert predictability, antagonize or neglect clients, or sow confusion and uncertainty is that they are generally functional for the agency. They limit client demands and the number of clients in a context where the agency has no dearth of responsibilities and would not in any way be harmed as an agency if clients became disaffected, passive, or refused to articulate demands. Any reduction in client demand is only absorbed by other clients who come forward, cr by a marginal and insignificant increase in the capacity of street-level bureaucrats to be responsive to the clients who continue to press. It is for this reason that we conclude that stated intentions of street-level bureaucracies to become more client-oriented, to receive more citizen input, and t.:> encourage clients to speak out are often questionable, no matter how sincere the administrators who articulate these fine goals. It is dysfunctional to most street-level bureaucracies to become more responsive. Increases in client demands at one point will only lead to mechanisms to ration services further at another point, assuming sources remain unchanged.

routines and simplifications are subject to biases from a variety of sources. While they often may be oriented toward fulfilling agency objectives, these measures are also structured to aid workers' job requirements, which may conflict with agency demands. Furthermore, routines and simplifications are subject to workers' occupational and personal biases, including the prejudices that blatantly and subtly permeate the society. The biases expressed in street-level work may be expected to be manifested in proportion to the freedom workers have in defining their work life and the slack in effective controls to suppress those biases. Since street-level bureaucrats have wide discretion about clients, are usually free from direct observation by supervisors or the general public, and are not much affected by client preferences, their routines and simplifications deserve considerable scrutiny.

Routines could be structured to maximize the achievement of agency objectives. Or they could be structured to maximize responsiveness to clients. No doubt these competing perspectives do account for workers' routines to some degree. [...] At least theoretically there is a considerable difference between routinization necessary for minimally efficient functioning and maximum routinization. organizations can decide to be less efficient in order also to be less routinized in their client interactions. Indeed, routinization may prove dysfunctional at some point, complicating efficient operations. Similarly, bureaucrats may be expected to categorize clients, but the extent to which they are open to fresh information contradicting facile categorization also is not predetermined. This is particularly important for street-level bureaucrats who have a public trust to make significant decisions about citizens' welfare. [...] However, the extent to which routines are structured to maximize worker control over the work context may measure the extent to which articulated agency policy objectives are difficult to achieve.

The routines of work in street-level bureaucracies appear to be directed toward achieving one or more of four purposes in processing clients.

1. They ration services.

2. They control clients and reduce the consequences of uncertainty.

3. They husband worker resources.

4. They manage the consequences of routine practice.

At times routines and simplifications will be entirely informal and contrary to agency policy. At other times they will be consistent with agency policy and may even be promoted by the agency. It is necessary to overlook this distinction in analyzing street-level bureaucracies because the line between formal and informal routines is often very uncertain. Often agencies will adopt as official procedure practices that workers previously adopted informally.

Cases that deviate from routine processing are not exempt from routinization, however. Instead street-level bureaucracies call on additional practices to manage the first-round costs of processing people in routine ways. These practices function to absorb dissatisfaction with common procedures, thereby permitting agencies to continue to process the majority of cases routinely. Ideally, complex systems ought to have procedures that come into play when extraordinary circumstances occur. [...] Street-level bureaucrats regularly refer difficult or problem cases to other people employed in their organization. Often this is uncomplicated, as when novices ask supervisors or more experienced workers to handle clients who present difficulties. The referral of difficult cases to more experienced workers hardly requires comment. From the point of view of service quality, the problem arises when referrals are made not because cases defy workers' abilities, but because they interfere with routine procedures. They must be treated as special by a bureaucracy which cannot afford to hear complaints or vigorous dissent from decisions at the same time that other clients with similar claims but less inclination to speak out are also being processed. The problem is kicked upstairs, not to seek expertise but to manage dissent or noncompliance.

Thus street-level bureaucracies introduce the "pressure specialist" to hear and decide on clients who pursue their cases vigorously. The pressure specialist serves in several ways. Dissenting clients are siphoned off, permitting routine procedures to be imposed for the vast majority. Pressure specialists also perform onerous tasks that would otherwise taint the entire staff. For example, severe punishments in schools are usually meted out by an administrator or designated disciplinarian, protecting teachers from having to punish severely students whom they are simultaneously asked to instruct. The availability of a pressure specialist in some respects protects the worker from the

clients' strong negative feelings by providing an alternative to decision making. [...] Thus the worker's legitimacy is partially protected by the availability of a channel that places responsibility for difficult decisions in the hands of others.

The possibility that decisions can be appealed also enhances the legitimacy of the bureaucracy to the client. For this to work on a sustained basis, however, two conditions must be met. First, and quite obviously, it must look like channels for appeal are open. Second, and less obviously, these channels must be costly to use, rarely successful, and, if successful, certainly not well publicized. The reason for this is simply that if appeals channels were inexpensive to use or likely to be successful they soon would be used by clients seeking increased benefits or a favorable disposition. The channels of appeal would soon be clogged, and the manifest unfairness that some clients receive more than others because they sought more would undermine the system. Thus appeals ordinarily require long delays, the services of advocates, complicated administrative procedures associated with filing, and general hostility from the challenged agency. [...] Public agencies also seek to insure that appeals cannot be sought collectively. The appeals process can function so long as a single client cannot gain redress for a class of clients. So long as individual clients cannot win benefits for groups, public agencies can ration the claims of large numbers of clients in many ways, and thus gain protection from an inundation of client demands.

A typical response of many public agencies to the claims generated by minority and women's rights movements has been to establish special units to hear citizen complaints and to take responsibility for institutional change in these areas. [...] Special units often end up taking responsibility for areas that are properly the general responsibility of other bureaucrats. They provide a symbolic approach to deeply divisive issues, and by providing street-level bureaucrats with a safety valve in their confrontation with clients, they may do as much harm as good with respect to changing the general orientation of agency personnel.

2.1.2. Ration services

2.1.2.1. Costs

Street-level bureaucracies can rarely assign monetary costs for services, since by definition public services are free. However, monetary costs are imposed in several instructive instances. [...] Programs sometimes force clients to incur monetary costs that discourage them from seeking service. Acquiring records from other agencies to establish eligibility or securing transcripts for appeals can be costly, particularly if travel is involved. Agencies that keep bankers' hours impose monetary costs on working people who cannot appear without losing wages. Appointments sometimes require parents to seek babysitters.

Just as available time is a resource for people in politics, it is also a unit of value that may be extracted from clients as a cost of service. Clients are typically required to wait for services; it is a sign of their dependence and relative powerlessness that the costs of matching servers with the served are home almost entirely by clients. It is to maximize the efficiency of workers' time that queues are generally established.

Time costs are often assessed by street-level bureaucrats as delay; they are often experienced by clients as waiting. Bureaucracies can reward clients by expediting service, punish them by delaying service. [...] Importantly, bureaucracies often have little interest in reducing delay, since more expeditious processing would simply strain available resources. Assessed time costs may also be

experienced as inconvenience, although they are levied as procedure. For example, when an agency refuses to receive complaints over the telephone and requires that they be written, it may cut off complaints lodged frivolously or on impulse, but also discourages complainants who would protest if it were easier. Requirements to complete multiple forms and produce extensive documentation function similarly.

Similar to the queue by appointment is the waiting list; clients are asked to wait for what is usually an undetermined amount of time until they can be accommodated. Although it appears to be straightforward on the surface, the waiting-list system has several important latent functions. First, as we have seen in the case of Boston public housing, a waiting list tends to increase the discretion of street-level bureaucrats by providing opportunities to call clients from the waiting list out of turn, or to provide special information that will permit them to take advantage of ways to be treated with higher priority. Waiting lists also permit agencies to give the appearance of service (after all, clients are on a waiting list) and to make a case for increased resources because of the backlog of demand. The waiting list appears to record the names of potential clients who are seeking service but cannot be accommodated, although it is obvious to all that many names continue on the list only because the agency has not attempted to discover who is actively waiting and who has long since ceased to be interested. Some social agencies act as if the waiting list usefully filters potential clients who are truly in need of service and strains out those whose needs are not substantial and who thus drop off. This system of rationing may also provide for a period of time in which spontaneous recuperation may occur, again reserving client spaces only for those who are needy. However, it is uncertain whether continuation on the list is a sign of substantial need or precisely the opposite, a sign that the potential client is successful enough in managing the problem that he or she can wait patiently for services.

Giving or withholding information is another way in which services may be rationed. Clients experience the giving or withholding of information in two ways. They experience the favoritism of street-level bureaucrats who provide some clients with privileged information, permitting them to manipulate the system better than others. And they experience it as confusing jargon, elaborate procedures, and arcane practices that act as barriers to understanding how to operate effectively within the system. [...] if it is recognized that organizations normally ration services by manipulating the nature and quantity of the information made available about services, then it is easily seen that demand levels are themselves a function of public policy. Client rolls will be seen as a function of clients' perception of service availability and the costs of seeking services. Client demand will be expressed only to the extent that clients themselves are aware that they have a social condition that can, should, and will be ministered to by public agencies.

Bureaucratic rationing is also achieved by imposing psychological costs on clients. Some of these are implicit in the rationing mechanisms already mentioned. Waiting to receive services, particularly when clients conclude that the wait is inordinate and reflects lack of respect, contributes to diminishing client demands. The administration of public welfare has been notorious for the psychological burdens clients have to bear. These include the degradation implicit in inquiries into sexual behavior, childbearing preferences, child rearing practices, friendship patterns, and persistent assumptions of fraud and dishonesty.

Although the dominant tendency is for street-level bureaucracies to attempt to limit demand by imposing (mostly non-monetary) costs for services, there are some times when they have a stake in increasing their clientele. They will do this through an analogous rationing process, now directed toward increasing utilization. Agencies are likely to try to increase their clientele when they are newly established and have to prove their ability to put services into operation. [...] Established street-level bureaucracies may also attempt to increase their clientele if they perceive themselves under attack and calculate that demonstrations of significant service provision, or increases in

clientele, might aid their cause. Relatedly, street-level bureaucracies may attempt to increase the number of clients when they are competing against other programs with similar objectives. Such agencies perceive that they are competing for the same client pool, and that only the more successful will survive in the next budget cycle.

2.1.2.2. Differentiation

Free public goods and services may be rationed by imposing costs and fixing their amount. They may also be rationed by allocating them differentially among classes of claimants. [...] to a degree the society wants bureaucracies to be capable of responding flexibly to unique situations and to be able to treat people in terms of their individual circumstances. [...] Aside from whatever overtly discriminatory practices develop in street-level bureaucracies, differentiating among clients occurs routinely because differentiation often assists street-level bureaucrats in managing their work loads, as in the tracking of school children. Or it may help them cope with the ambiguities and psychological stresses of their jobs. Client differentiation may take place because, confronted with heavy work loads and apparently impossible tasks, street-level bureaucrats seek ways to maximize personal or agency resources, or they attempt to succeed with some clients when they cannot succeed with all.

It is probably fair to say that clients will always be differentiated in terms of their perceived relative normality, regardless of how absolutely receptive to intervention they are. This provides street-level bureaucrats with the insurance that they always perceive a set of clients for whom they are necessary. [...] The rule of normality also helps insure that a part of the client population will be regarded as requiring or able to benefit from intervention, and a part will be thought of as unresponsive or unworthy of help. In general, street-level bureaucrats establish expectations of client behavior, both in terms of performance and in terms of their interaction with the bureaucracy. Deviations from these standards tend to be differentiated.

Self-fulfilling prophecies contribute to the persistence of bias by providing spurious confirmation of the validity of differentiation. [...] It should be no surprise that self-fulfilling prophecies run throughout street-level bureaucracies. If clients are differentiated they will respond to that differentiation by accepting in part the implications of the differentiation for their own identities.

The problem is not that moral judgments are made but that the diffuse moral assumptions of dominant social orientations are likely to influence the decision. Or that dominant values may shape decisions despite competing normative standards that would provide alternative solutions. [...] Unsanctioned, persistent differentiation is supported by the racism and prejudices that permeate the society and are grounded in the structure of inequality. Differentiation is intrinsic to street-level bureaucracy, but social inequality supports it and helps account for the cleavages in terms of which differentiation takes place. Thus the need to routinize, simplify, and differentiate in the context of inequality leads to the institutionalization of the stereotypical tendencies that permeate the society. Whatever prejudices street-level bureaucrats as individuals do or do not have, the structure of their work appears to call for differentiation of the client population, and thus there is structural receptivity to prejudicial attitudes. The need for simplification exists, so to speak, prior to the stereotype. The stereotype is nurtured in a context where it functions to divide up the client population.

This does not mean that all street-level bureaucrats are prejudiced or that efforts to reduce biased behavior ought not to be promoted. It does mean that efforts to eliminate prejudiced behavior will tend to yield best results if they address directly the work problems for which the holding of biases is a psychological solution. Workshops that help workers discover that the assumptions they hold

about clients are not necessary to function effectively, and those that provide information about techniques of interaction would likely succeed in eliminating biased behavior far more often than more abstract seminars on race relations. From this perspective the problem of bias is a profound one, not only for the quality of service but also for the legitimacy of government. There can be little official recognition that bias exists if it is bureaucratically functional. Clients and concerned citizens see biased behavior. Street-level bureaucrats on a daily basis see attitudes forged from experience reinforced in their validity. Clients see unfairness; street-level bureaucrats see rational responses to bureaucratic necessities.

Street-level bureaucrats are conspicuously prone to scan their environment for empirical validation of their views. Their conceptions of clients tend to be consistent with perspectives that exonerate them from responsibility for clients' fate. They are particularly inclined to believe that experience provides the basis for knowledge in assessing the client world. While validity by illustration is logically indefensible it is a significant social fact that influences street-level behavior. We may hypothesize that validity by illustration ("I know it's true because I once had a client who ... ") will prevail in proportion to the worker's need to cope with the uncertainties of decision making and the potential consequences of those decisions. [...] Undoubtedly there are many street-level bureaucrats who refuse to accept the perspectives of their jobs that arise in the occupational subculture. Still, the strength of mechanisms adopted to cope with the work is great precisely because, if they are successful coping devices, they work (by definition). The need to cope acts as a barrier to anomalous information that might challenge the routines and orientations that have been developed over time. Changes in procedures are not necessarily resisted because workers are against change per se, but because change threatens the existence of coping routines and orientations that serve to rationalize the work. Similarly, anomalous information is not heard because it contradicts assumptions that make the job more rewarding or rationalizes its contradictions.

2.1.3. Controlling clients

Every social order depends on the general consent of its members. Even the most coercive of institutions, such as prisons, function only so long as those affected by the institution cooperate in its activities (even if the cooperation is secured ultimately by force). Typically, cooperation is neither actively coerced nor freely given, but, rather, it emerges from the structure of alternatives. [...] The work that clients are expected to cooperate with may or may not be consistent with agencies' policy declarations. It will, however, be consistent with street-level bureaucrats' conceptions of how to process work with minimal risk of disruption to routine practice.

The most important aspects of interactions with clients are those affecting the structure of the interactions: when they will take place, with what frequency, under what circumstances, with what resources commanded by the parties. The structure of interactions limits and determines the range of behavioral actions from which clients may choose their responses. Street-level bureaucrats organize the context of decision making so that they are able to process clients under circumstances most favorable to controlling their behavior. In this they are not constrained by fear of client retaliation and for the most part can impose on the clients whatever costs are involved.

[Street-level bureaucrats] convey cues as to the degree of deference expected [and] communicate the penalties for failing to display proper deference. [...] They will not easily let an affront to their authority remain unchallenged, since to do so would be to teach the contrary lesson, that lack of deference will not be punished. Again, lessons of this sort are usually taught subtly. Menace, threat, or punishment will more often be hinted at than carried out. [...] At the individual level street-level bureaucrats often convey to clients that they should expect few services. [...] If nothing truly can be done, it is proper to convey this to clients. The problem is that "nothing can be done" is only another

way of saying that the bureaucracy or individual worker does not intend to change priorities. Yet it is often obvious to clients that more could be done if priorities were shifted. [...] At the agency level, bureaucracies also attempt to convey proper levels of expectations. Long lines not only discourage prospective clients but also convey that many people have to be processed; hence individual clients should appreciate that workers have little time to spend with them or on their problems.

Street-level bureaucrats often attempt to involve clients in the difficulties of their jobs in order to gain understanding or sympathy for their position. Assertions that "I'm just doing my job," or "I'm following orders" help bring the client to an agency point of view. The client is implicitly asked to abandon his or her own interest in the interaction in a friendly, not overtly conflictual tone. But there is little choice involved, since the structure of the institution requires the client to comply or else risk alienating the more powerful street-level bureaucrat.

The greater the involvement of the client with the agencies and their employees, the more sustained and critical the psychological implications of the interactions. [...] Institutions that fully dominate peoples' lives have extensive influence over personality development. As Erving Coffman has demonstrated, mental hospitals teach patients how to be patients by rewarding behavior that conforms to staff expectations of how mentally ill people behave. Thus they not only teach the client role but touch the person playing the role as well, since for mental patients the role is also their salient personal identity. The closer institutions get to total involvement with clients, the more their self-images may be affected in a sustained way.

The social construction of the client, involving the client, others relevant to the client, and the public employees with whom they must deal is a significant process of social definition often unrelated to objective factors and therefore open to the influences of prejudice, stereotype, and ignorance as a basis for determinations.

Street-level bureaucracies tend to resist organization by clients when it occurs. They tend to regard client organizations as unnecessary, frivolous, likely to be irresponsible, or not representative of clients' true interests. There are no objective measures of the validity of such assertions. From some perspectives any or all might be true. However, these assertions are most usefully regarded as defenses against client organization, intended to diminish their influence among potential recruits or third parties whose support is sought, or to lay the groundwork for an intransigent official response. [...] Public officials often prefer to suppress or disorient client organizations because they can never be sure at what point they will peak or major concessions will be required. However, one lesson learned well by public officials during the past ten years is that it is often possible and desirable to encourage client organizations in order to provide a buffer between individual clients and the agency. Lacking substantive powers or the resources to act effectively, client organizations often provide the appearance of access while actually influencing only those areas in which policy decisions do not materially affect agency behavior.

A final set of practices operating to conserve resources is associated with referrals. Referring a client from one agency to another obviously serves the client's interest when there is an identified, specific client need and resources are available from the receiving organization. However, there is a class of referrals which, whatever its contribution to client well-being, appears to function more to process heavy case loads in resource-poor agencies than to fulfill specific client needs. Street-level bureaucrats may make referrals as one of the least costly ways to process clients without providing services. Thus agencies may maintain benign images of helpfulness and service, without explicitly having to tum clients away. This use of referrals is partly a result of the extraordinary demand for resources relative to the supply. Public agencies, responsibly seeking to meet clients' needs, attempt to link them with other agencies when their own resources become swamped. This works to the

satisfaction of all when resources are available in other agencies, but it turns into a referral merry-go-round when other agencies become similarly inundated.

Referrals also may represent a way in which agencies protect themselves by providing symbolic service when actual services are not available. [...] Referrals also have some of the qualities of court delays and waiting lists. More people can be accommodated into the service structure at orie time, although no more service is actually provided. And referrals can result in inducing people to stop seeking services because they consider their need less important now relative to the costs, or they have been encouraged to resolve their problems on their own. Whatever explains the drop-off from the referral net, it functions to some extent to ration the community services available.

2.2. Perception of clients

Popular wisdom often identifies the source of workers' attitudes toward clients and their jobs in prejudices acquired in upbringing and social background. Such perspectives lead to recommendations to hire better educated personnel or provide further education and training in public and human relations. All too often such perspectives fail to take account of the influence of street-level bureaucrats' work on their attitudes. It is apparent that street-level bureaucrats change their attitudes from the time they are recruited to the time when they begin to experience work problems. Differences in the class backgrounds of recruits tend to disappear in training and trainee socialization. Furthermore, there is evidence that educational background, which is closely related to class, is not an important predictor of the attitudes of workers who experience extreme job stresses.

Taking a different view, the origins of bias in street-level bureaucracies may be sought in the structure of work that requires coping responses to job stress. Attitudinal developments that redefine the nature of the job, or the nature of the clientele to be served, function in this way. Considering the structure of work helps explain the persistence of biases and the difficulties inherent in interrupting them. However, the content of coping responses may well reflect the prevailing biases of the society. The need for biases may be rooted in the work structure, but the expression of this need may take different forms.

Stereotyping thus may be thought of as a form of simplification. While simplifications are mental shortcuts (of many different kinds) that summarize and come to stand for more complex phenomena, stereotypes are simplifications in whose validity people strongly believe, and yet they are prejudicial and inaccurate as summary characteristics for groups of people with nominally similar attributes. This approach to analyzing the client-processing mentality detaches the existence of attitudes toward clients and jobs from the content of those attitudes. It suggests that attitudinal dispositions will be rigid or flexible in large measure according to the degree they help workers cope with job stresses. On the other hand, it suggests that workers' attitudes and resulting behavior may be challenged and helped to change if: incentives and sanctions within the structure of the job encourage change; the structure of the job is altered to reduce workers' needs for psychological coping mechanisms; it can be shown that workers can cope successfully with job stresses without depending upon undesirable simplifications; efforts are made to make simplifications conform to actual job requirements rather than to unrelated biases.

Perhaps the most familiar syndrome of private re-conceptions of clients concerns locating responsibility for client difficulties. Assumptions about who or what is responsible for clients' situations are significant conceptual instruments by which street-level bureaucrats distance themselves from clients. For example, the tendency of helping professionals to blame the victim, attributing the cause of clients' situations to the individuals themselves without considering the role

of social and environmental contexts, locates responsibility in a place that absolves the helper from blame. If the client is to blame, street-level bureaucrats are shielded from having to confront their own failures or the failures of the agencies for which they work.

An opposite but functionally equivalent mode of perceiving clients also serves to absolve street-level bureaucrats from responsibility for service failures. This is the tendency to take an entirely environmental point of view and perceive clients exclusively as the products of inadequate background conditioning.

Given the imbalance in power between clients and their agencies, not all clients will respond with hostility to decisions based on these implicit assumptions. Perhaps more commonly, clients accept the implicit assumptions of responsibility; then these conceptual structures contribute to client compliance with agency policy. Clients may accept responsibility for their circumstances without reference to the environmental conditions that they experience. Or they may regard their situation as hopeless because their environment is so antagonistic to improvement. Each attitudinal set works against personal movement and growth.

Finally, street-level bureaucrats work in a milieu in which their co-workers have similar needs to segment the client population. Thus attitudes prejudicial or beneficial to certain clients are likely to reverberate among, rather than be contradicted by, other workers. Street-level bureaucrats have a need to modify their conceptions of clients quite apart from but usually consistent with the prejudices of the general society. And they work in a structure that tends to confirm the validity of their biases. The general argument of this section, based on observations that street-level bureaucrats consistently introduce unsanctioned biases into client processing, suggests that it would be difficult to eliminate client differentiation without changing the structure of work for which these biases are functional.

This is not to say that any particular bias is necessary to cope with the work. No doubt classes of clients may be treated in markedly different ways if administrators pay enough attention to specific behavior of workers. But without changes in the work structure one ought to expect that biases will soon develop in other areas, or that the old biases will soon emerge in new forms in the absence of considerable vigilance.

2.3. Perception of their job

Withdrawal from work is one way that people respond to job stress. They may withdraw in fact, or they may withdraw psychologically. At the extreme, the tension between capabilities and objectives may be resolved by quitting. Or, in anticipation of this tension, people may decline to apply for public employment in the first place. [...] In some ways these idealists are potentially the most dedicated public employees. In other respects they are least suited to do the work. In any event public agencies are left with a work force least bothered by the discrepancies between what they are supposed to do and what they actually do.

Those who do not actually withdraw from the work force may withdraw psychologically without actually quitting, rejecting personal responsibility for agency performance. The outward manifestation of these withdrawal orientations are familiar to managers and people attentive to labor-management relations: absenteeism, high turnover, goldbricking, slowdowns, and general withdrawal from involvement. [...] At base-are psychological developments that function to help workers maintain a distance from their failure or inability to realize the symbiotic goals of personal gratification and task realization.

However, while some street-level bureaucrats may retire on the job, the vast majority continue to be reasonably dedicated to occupational objectives as they come to define them.

In addition to the usual material and psychological incentives operating on the job, street-level bureaucrats often enter public service with some interest in client-oriented work, embrace professional orientations that call for altruistic behavior toward clients, and continually interact with clients, thus regularly confronting client characteristics and concerns. Moreover, street-level bureaucrats do not abandon agency objectives entirely because the discretionary nature of their jobs and the organizational milieu in which they work encourage them to develop private conceptions of the agency's objectives. They strive to realize these modified objectives and measure their day-to-day achievements in terms of them. They rationalize ambiguities and contradictions in objectives by developing their own conceptions of the public service (which they may share with other workers). Taking limitations in the work as a fixed reality rather than a problem with which to grapple, street-level bureaucrats forge a way to obtain job satisfaction and consistency between aspirations and perceived capability.

Accepting limitations as fixed rather than as problematic is significant for two reasons. First, it discourages innovation and encourages mediocrity. It is one thing to say that resources are limited, another to say that the practices arising from trying to cope with limited resources are optimal. Yet the tendency to equate what exists with what is best is strong when patterns of practice must be defended psychologically to avoid confrontations with work failures. Second, as I have argued, organizational patterns of practice in street-level bureaucracies are the policies of the organization. Thus, workers' private redefinition of agency ends result directly in accepting the means as ends. Means may become ends in other organizations, but lower-level workers rarely have as much influence on the drift in goals as in street-level bureaucracies.

the benefits gained from modifying goals to make them consistent with serving a few, when not all can be served well, are not public benefits. On the contrary they are enjoyed mostly by the workers (and presumably by the clients who receive special attention). Moreover, they are not open to popular judgment or normally available for policy analysis. The individual street-level bureaucrat is not, in a sense, free to abandon private conceptions of the job without taking on still more of the tensions that go with it. Because these personal conceptions are adaptive responses they tend to be held rigidly and are not open for discussion. The patterns of practice developed by individual workers often only make sense in the private conception of the job held by the worker, while supervisors and the public still expect allegiance to a more complex set of goals.

Private conceptions of the job have their counterparts in official policy. In some cases agencies themselves solve workers' problems by imposing a particular orientation on the work. At other times, the adaptive defensive attitudes of street-level bureaucrats toward their jobs are incorporated in the service orientation of their agencies although still officially unsanctioned. Thus the staff of some schools develop collective perspectives on their work and some police departments develop a shared view of patrol practices, contrary to the preferences of supervisors. Recruitment of like-minded people to the service contributes to collective adaptation to bureaucratic stresses by excluding staff members who would challenge work-force goal consensus.

Specialization of function in bureaucracy is usually treated as fostering efficiency, permitting workers to develop skills and expertise and concentrate attention on their work. [...] Specialization permits street-level bureaucrats to avoid seeing their work as a whole. Once specialized they are expected, and expect themselves, to pursue an agenda that calls for the deployment of a restricted set of (perhaps highly developed) skills toward the achievement of a result defined by those skills. Specialists tend to perceive the client and his or her problems in terms of the methodologies and

previously established processing categories that their training dictates. Rare is the specialist who retains a comprehensive conception of the client and the alternatives available for processing. In some fields, such as special education, critics have advocated the training of general specialists capable of working with children with any learning disability or physical or psychological behavior. (This confirms the obvious: teachers should be well trained for the job, and the base of practice and theory from which they should operate has expanded significantly.) [...] Specialists undoubtedly bring important skills and orientations to organizations that cannot develop them in their staff as a whole. Yet specialization and task specificity should be analyzed to discover those circumstances in which the costs of relieving street-level bureaucrats from contradictions and ambiguities may be higher than the benefits.

Another dimension of goal consolidation is provided by the occupational or professional ideology that governs street-level bureaucracies. Ideology provides a framework in terms of which disparate bits of information are stored, comprehended, and retrieved. In street-level bureaucracies ideology also can serve as a way of disciplining goal orientations when many goals compete. When a school becomes an open classroom school or reverts to a traditional model the directors are saying something about their goals as well as their methods. The same is true in the case of correctional facilities that assert the primacy of custody over treatment. By stressing some objectives over others, administrators partially solve the problem of what kind of institution they will run. Thus hiring becomes more rational because objectives are clearer, and employees have a clearer sense of what they are expected to achieve.

In recent years considerable attention has been devoted to the trend towards "medicalization" of social problems. Advanced by physicians and supported by a public anxious to think that there are "solutions" to behavioral "problems," the medical model has intruded into the worlds of education and corrections, and other environments in which human development is at issue. This trend has been correctly understood as undermining the political and social status of individuals, who, labeled "diseased" or "sick," are expected by the society to accept others' definitions of their circumstances and means for recovery. The significance for social control is substantial. What in other times might be understood as rebellious behavior may now be processed as mere sickness, implying no indictment and certainly no culpability on the part of social institutions that may have contributed to the genesis of the behavior.

Why has the medical orientation become so prominent? The influence of physicians and the high regard in which most people hold them surely provides part of the answer. But this does not fully explain the attraction of the medical orientation to say, educators, who in some respects have competing professional perspectives. A substantial addition to understanding the attraction of the medical milieu in education, corrections, and other fields may be gained by recognizing the ways in which the introduction of a therapeutic milieu contributes to simplifying the goal orientations of public service workers. It provides a defense against personal responsibility of the worker by resting responsibility for clients in their physical or psychological development. It provides a theory of client behavior to help explain the complex world of the street-level bureaucrat. And it provides a clear statement of clients' problems in terms of which responses can be formulated. The hegemony of the medical model may be explained not only by the influence of physicians but also by the way it helps street-level bureaucrats solve problems of goal complexity.

Street-level bureaucrats sometimes cope with their jobs by privately modifying the scope of their authority. Imposing restrictions on the scope of their powers frees street-level bureaucrats from perceived responsibility for outcomes and reduces the strain between resources and obj...ctives. Denying discretion is a common way !o limit responsibility. Workers seek to deny that they have_influence, are free to make decisions, or offer service alternatives. Strict adherence to rules, and refusals to make exceptions when exceptions might be made, provide workers with defenses

against the possibility that they might be able to act more as clients would wish. "That's the way things are," "It's the law," and similar rationalizations not only protect workers from client pressures, but also protect them from confronting their own shortcomings as participants in public service work.

3. What is needed to change street level bureaucracies?

In considering the potential for change in street-level bureaucracies it would be a mistake to restrict analysis to the coping dilemmas and adaptations of service workers, or the patterns of practice that develop among them. The resolution of contradictory tendencies in street-level bureaucracies cannot be understood without examining the role of these public agencies in the society and the ways in which the society impinges on the character of bureaucratic relations. As V. O. Key Jr. has observed: "... one of the great functions of the bureaucratic organizations is as a conservator of the values of a culture. In the purposes, procedures, ceremonies, outlook, and habits of the bureaucracy are formalized the traditional cultural values. " This observation actively translates into reciprocity between the larger society and the structure of bureaucratic institutions. For street-level bureaucracy it means that these agencies are embedded in a larger system that creates and fortifies working conditions. In turn, street-level bureaucracies help reproduce prevailing relations between individuals and government organizations.

The welfare state calls for and requires .social programs to ameliorate the neglect and insecurity of the economic system, to prepare people for roles in the economy, or to manage their deviation from expectations of appropriate behavior. In the ideology of the welfare state humanitarian impulses are coincident with the requirements of system maintenance. This, of course, begins to explain how people with humanitarian impulses can work for impersonal, paternalistic, or repressive public service agencies. Most people never question that the requirements of the state are congruent with the needs and interests oflarge numbers of people.

The legitimacy of the political and economic system depends on the appearance of providing for those who cannot provide for themselves and responding openly and fairly to citizens' claims. Public service workers actively translate this requirement into programs. But government policy is not likely in fact to respond fully to the needs of citizens [...] In short, this is a political system that, whatever its current levels of social welfare expenditures, must also symbolically project images of adequate and reasonably comprehensive social welfare programming to taxpayers and middle-class consumers, while in fact it limits support and assistance. Such a system develops mechanisms to maintain legitimacy and deflect criticism that the society does not provide adequately for its citizens. Street-level bureaucrats mediate between citizens and the state in that clients' inability to obtain benefits or services and inequities of distribution may be understood by clients as personal malfeasance of street-level bureaucrats or administrative agency disarray.

In addition to absorbing conflict in their buffer roles, street-level bureaucrats in other ways help shape the general attitudes of clients and workers towards public services. [...] street-level bureaucracies discourage employees who seek to work as advocates. The process begins when the agencies provide an avenue for people with altruistic orientations to enter the work force. Although job security is a significant attraction, another important element in seeking street-level work is the opportunity to help people. [...] Once attracted to these occupations, however, the dynamics of street-level bureaucracies combine to persuade workers that they are destined to be ineffective in their chosen fields, that clients may not substantially benefit from their efforts, or that conditions of successful intervention are not likely to be available. These conclusions are all the more persuasive because they appear to be substantially true, at least in the short run.

Thus, generations of thoughtful and potentially self-sacrificing people are disarmed in their social purpose. They come to believe that it is impossible to find conditions conducive to good practice, and that public agencies cannot be otherwise structured. Their choices appear to be to leave public employment for other work or to resign themselves to routine processing of clients while instructing the next generation of idealists that there is little sense in hoping for change or in rendering human services. Similarly, the practice of street-level bureaucrats leads to the self-fulfilling prophecy that relations with clients cannot change. The actions of street-level bureaucrats confirm for clients that they will continue to be treated as they have always been treated. This perpetuates the cycle of the irrelevance of professional help and reinforces tendencies toward despair and inaction. This is the most painful part of the estrangement of workers from their original purpose. These orientations reinforce the tendencies originating in the culture toward enhancement of private interests and the abandonment of social purpose.

The potential for growth and change in street-level bureaucracy is dependent on both identifying the critical problems and recognizing that patterns of practice may be reconstructed as well as reproduced. With this in mind it may be useful to mention several other factors that contribute to the difficulty of reconstructing street-level bureaucracy [...] Conflict between contending interests may be inevitable (by definition), and in any event it may be socially productive, but it is difficult to think about deliberately changing major institutions when it appears that the interests of one party conflict so fundamentally with the interests of other powerful groups. The more that contending interests appear to be fundamentally in conflict with others, the more hopeless social change appears to be for interests that are relatively weak.

A second difficulty is that the patterns of practice that develop in this work are rooted in the fundamental coping requirements of the job. These are not easily abandoned or changed because they are experienced by workers and outside observers as virtual job requirements. People do not readily give up survival mechanisms. This is one of the reasons it is easier to change articulated policy from the top than to change practice from below. Policy articulated from the top is not rooted in defense mechanisms developed to cope with the job, while the policy that emerges from practice is rooted in survival.

Finally, thinking about significant changes in street-level practice implies a commitment to altering or improving relations between individual workers and clients. Yet we are profoundly shy and inexperienced in talking about relations between and among people. We know much more about deploying resources than about affecting working relations. It is typical for community meetings to address issues of recruitment, procedures, incentive structures, chains of command, and so on, instead of confronting the problems that actually brought people together in the first place-incompetent or insensitive teachers, police officers, or social workers. It is easier to avoid these problems, the heart of community relations, and defer them as professional matters better left for professionals to handle. In any event it is difficult to measure the quality of relationships; better to stick to dimensions of the work more subject to administrative manipulation.

Nonetheless, it is important to address the potential for significant reform, however remote. To say that institutions are stable does not mean that they are inert, or that the possibility for movement is unavailable. Indeed, street-level bureaucracies continually confront proposals for change. Seeking efficiency, equity with flexibility, and appropriateness of intervention, from different perspectives public officials, client-oriented interest groups, organized public employees, and policy analysts perpetually engage in activities to reform the public services.

A theory of street-level bureaucracy should help clarify the stakes in and potential for reform perspectives. At any given level of public support we seek at least three values from service

bureaucracies. We seek services or benefits appropriate to our situation or needs, equity tempered by flexibility in the distribution of public benefits, and respect as citizens receiving our due from government. Many of the criticisms of street-level bureaucracies focus on the extent to which people fail to receive appropriate, equitable, or respectful encounters. Taking these criticisms as points of departure, three major lines of analysis are discussed below.

3.1. Encouraging client autonomy and influence over policy.

Proposals for greater client autonomy generally suffer from the fact that clients tend to remain relatively powerless. Clients accorded greater collective influence may not possess the bureaucratic skills necessary to operate in the policy arena, or they may inherit control over programs or facilities so bankrupt that they defy significant management improvements.

[One] set of reform proposals calls for eliminating mediating public workers from service contexts which, properly supported, might be handled by citizens with little or minimum assistance. [...] Not all proposals to support indigenous efforts to provide service and eliminate mediating public employees will accomplish these objectives. They may spawn quasi-public agencies that have the potential for replicating the difficulties of the agencies they replace. They may develop entitlement, regulatory, or service bureaucracies that perpetuate bureaucratic experiences. Home care, for example, frees people to stay out of the hospital under certain circumstances, but it still requires a bureaucracy to certify eligibility, to promulgate and monitor standards for service providers, and to see that service personnel are hired to provide home care. In general, questions of supply and maintenance of standards remain in all service areas so long as the government retains ultimate responsibility.

These alternative perspectives on service provision suggest opportunities to define the relationship of providers and clients differently. However, they do not fundamentally reorganize the need for service in many instances and do not offer guidance where street-level bureaucrats remain in a controlling relationship. A sharp need continues to provide a better balance of power between street-level workers and clients. A better balance would be achieved if the following developments were encouraged.

Wherever possible, opportunities should be seized to demystify street-level bureaucracies and the practices in which they engage. Workers should be taught how to communicate with their publics in plain language, and clients should demand explanations they can understand. Client advocates should be sponsored and trained to guide clients through the bureaucracy, to obtain answers they are otherwise unable to get, and to represent clients to workers where they would otherwise be intimidated. Guides to clients' rights and maps of bureaucratic systems should be developed; more important, street-level bureaucracies should simplify procedures to make service systems more manageable without expert intervention.

Simple practices should be developed to make street-level bureaucracies more accountable to clients. Requiring workers to provide summaries of the transactions clients experienced but may not have fully comprehended would be a significant step forward in some places. Routine reviews to determine whether clients were receiving all benefits to which they ~ere entitled would place the burden of programming for clients on public employees. Such details would modestly contribute to the development of more reciprocal relationships.

As a matter of public policy we should welcome investigations by publicinterest law firms, legal services offices, government agencies, and others challenging prevailing practices where those practices entail responsible allegations of inhumane service or systematically neglected clients'

rights. We should recognize that the discretion of street-level workers is uncertainly monitored at best and that governments that create these bureaucracies may properly oversee their direction by encouraging client as well as bureaucratic scrutiny.

The struggle of clients to organize and obtain some control over service provision should be respected and encouraged. Client involvement in governance of service agencies will help to insure that clients contribute to the way street-level bureaucrats define their roles. Service provision should be decentralized to a significant extent, so that the advantages of orienting practice toward local initiatives can be realized.

During the 1960s some communities experimented with client participation in governance of schools, neighborhood health centers, public housing, and other public services. From these experiences we should know better than to encourage citizen control without examining the conditions of transfer and the degree of control. More often than not, the experiments of the 1960s inappropriately discredited citizen participation by providing control over programs lacking financial viability or by narrowly circumscribing the scope or powers of client or citizen boards. While avoiding the problems of cooptation of community activists in financially unhealthy public enterprises, or of tokenistic participation, client control over service bureaucracies remains potentially critical in making the bureaucracies more responsive to clients.

3.2. Improving current street-level practice.

Managing discretion is at the heart of the problem of street-level bureaucracy. For the most part, society is not willing fully to circumscribe street-level discretion. However, there may be some contexts in which it is desirable to circumscribe it. It is hardly obvious that every discretionary role played by street-level bureaucrats should continue to exist. Where workers' discretion leads to unfair and unequal treatment of clients, with no compensating benefits, it should be desirable to reform systems by removing this unredeemed source of unfairness.

Some situations may arise, or may develop from previous practices, in which the judgment must be made that intervention by street-level bureaucrats is harmful or wasteful. However, the judgment that street-level bureaucrats' discretion is inappropriate is not necessarily easily made. [...] To what extent [would] this reform indeed eliminate discretion, or simply transfer discretionary powers to a new set of employees? Finally, by eliminating the social service provider at intake, to what extent [would] this reform represent an implicit decision to reduce service levels by restricting social workers' opportunities to pick up relevant problems at intake, when people are often most receptive to assistance?

There is a necessary and inevitable tension between the desire to have an impact in the short run, and the recognition that problems are not reducible to short-term incremental manipulations. Furthermore, significant changes in street-level bureaucracy are likely to be realized only in the context of social changes that support the relationships that must be forged. Short of such changes, these lines of analysis simply become points of dispute in an ongoing struggle over the relationship of citizens to the state.

Embedded within the critique of street-level bureaucracy appear to be piecemeal formulas for reform. If discretion were constricted street-level bureaucrats would have less need for routines and simplifications to deal with uncertainty. If goals were clearer, workers could direct their energies with less ambivalence. If appropriate performance measures were available, street-level bureaucrats could be made more accountable for their behavior. Within limits these observations are probably

correct and sometimes may form the basis for action. However, ultimately they are likely to be quite limited for several reasons.

First, conditions of street-level bureaucracy comprise a syndrome. Except for those instances in which client-worker interactions can be eliminated, the conditions affecting the work context occur together and cannot easily be rationalized or simplified. Goals are ambiguous, performance measures are difficult to obtain, and discretion is required by virtue of the need for human interaction. It is unlikely that the apparent looseness of the bureaucratic context can be tightened up. If the organization could be tightened up, it is likely that it would have been tightened up before. To say that human interaction is required in service delivery is to suggest that judgments must be made about potentially ambiguous situations. Reciprocally, to say that the conditions of street-level bureaucracy exist is to say that the situation requires human judgment. It is quite unlikely that a part of the street-level bureaucracy syndrome can be transformed without a change in the basic assumptions underlying the service policy.

Second, even if it were possible to clarify lower-level workers' decisionmaking contexts, it is uncertain whether improvement in one aspect of the syndrome would alleviate problems arising from the whole. This would be different if the problems of street-level bureaucracy were additive so that every diminution of an aspect of the problem would result in a corresponding benefit.

The best chances of affecting work performance through job enhancement come when the system of service delivery supports workers in maintaining high standards ofservice quality. It is likely to be helpful if proposals for supporting practice are specifically job related, that is, helpful in solving specific challenges experienced by workers. [...] This suggests some of the limits to direct job training. If street-level bureaucrats are likely to retain only that counsel relating to current job problem solving, then training oriented toward transforming jobs into something else is likely to be ineffective. Thus one would be skeptical about developing new kinds of street-level bureaucrats primarily through instructional efforts.

3.3. Helping street-level bureaucrats become more effective proponents of change.

Public policy to influence the direction of professionalization is typically directed toward paying higher salaries to make these occupations more desirable to a more educated class of people, improving and subsidizing preprofessional training through universities, overseeing certification through professional boards to insure minimum standards, and making promotion and advancement dependent, at least superficially, on meeting professional standards of performance.

The problem with the "professional fix" in solving dilemmas of street-level accountability lies in the great gap between the service orientation of professionals in theory and professional service orientations in practice. [...] studies of professional practice suggest that doctors, lawyers, and other professions tend to seek out higher-status clients at the expense of low-status clients, to neglect necessary services in favor of exotic or financially rewarding specialities, to allow the market for specialists to operate so as to create extreme inequalities in the distribution of available practitioners, to provide only meagerly for the professional needs of low-income people, and to respond to poor people in controlling and manipulative ways when they do serve them. [...] At the very least these observations caution us to be quite skeptical of proposals to solve problems of street-level bureaucracy through increased professionalism.

In every era, there is a propensity among at least some members of street-level bureaucracies to work according to the ideal standards of their roles. If we must depend upon a core of street-level workers who will strive to maintain integrity in the exercise of discretion, we may well ask what can be done to support and enlarge this core? Where such a core does not presently exist, we may ask what can be done to bring it into being? What can be done to keep the new street-level bureaucrats flexible in their response to clients and zealous in their commitment to client rights while delivering public policy? While pursuing these objectives, what can be done to insure that the new street-level bureaucrat possesses the skills to intervene with clients effectively? It is helpful to ask these questions in these ways because they direct attention to building on opportunities that currently exist.

Financial support for the human side of street-level bureaucracies is a necessary although insufficient condition. Although additional resources cannot overcome the patterns of routinization and simplification that are currently endemic, teachers, legal services lawyers, police officers, and other street-level bureaucrats will not have the slack to organize themselves for more responsive interactions with clients unless they have adequate material support. It is particularly important to reverse the current decline in support for the human services, since workers' impressions of harassment and resource inadequacy are probably as important as the fact when it comes time to organize client processing. Public agencies must provide an atmosphere of deliberation or workers will not be able to escape the conviction, rooted in coping needs, that they must routinize client processing. This is part of the reason that incremental reductions in case load often fail to-show an effect, since the feeling of harassment remains when case loads are marginally reduced, say, from so to 45 cases.

Financial resources are also necessary to provide the incentives necessary to make possible career commitments. It is not that a new street-level bureaucracy needs to provide the same financial rewards as careers in the private sector. However, the substantial material (and purposive) uncertainties of this public service work are detrimental to building a cadre of committed human service workers.

The development of peer support mechanisms can and must be related to work processes. Street-level bureaucrats need to receive recognition for good work and to be free to seek help when they encounter work-related difficulties, without feeling that their reputations are in jeopardy. Perhaps outside specialists should systematically review the work of street-level bureaucrats with their clients. Perhaps agencies can develop this capacity without such assistance. Whatever the mechanism, those street-level bureaucrats who continue to aspire to provide appropriate community service will welcome the chance to grow in their jobs without being judged and placed at risk in the process.

A street-level bureaucracy that has developed processes of staff growth and development will also develop processes for small group decision making. Small group units for street-level decision making (for example, grade levels or departments in schools, sub-precinct units in police departments, neighborhood service offices in legal assistance and health maintenance) are probably best suited to determine which aspects of social services should be routinized and which aspects should remain unprogrammed. Routinization in social life may be inevitable, but it is not inevitable that routines should be imposed from above or by authorities that do not directly confront clients. Decentralized units would be far more likely to develop routines consistent with responsive and efficient client treatment than authorities removed from the scene, particularly if outside audits are continually able to draw attention to issues of service quality.

In reality, decentralized units given full responsibility for practice would have to resist the tendency to drift toward recentralization of routine functioning. The pull would be strong to let higher

authorities make critical decisions, thereby absolving lower-level workers of responsibility. However, even creating the opportunity for self-determination of small units provides a context for considerable learning and the potential for achieving a more client-oriented practice.

Three considerations conducive to workers' exercising effective and responsible control over the work situation m,ay help consolidate changes in street-level bureaucracies in ways that limit the likelihood of retrenchment.

First, the clients of service must become a more potent force in the reference groups of street-level bureaucrats. Ways must be discovered to make visible and accessible the behavior of lower-level workers, and clients likely to be affected by their actions must become more involved in the definition of good practice. To the extent that peer relations are the primary source of the expectations and values promoted within the occupational sector, there will remain a temptation to develop esoteric criteria of practice judgment. Street-level bureaucrats' performance has not been so good nor our confidence in their work so well established that great harm would come from creating regular mechanisms to expose street-level work to the scrutiny of clients. Even if clients are overwhelmed by the trappings and rhetoric of professionalism or are limited in their understanding of the ramifications of decision making, exposing the decision-making environment to clients should anchor street-level bureaucracies more firmly in a client orientation. Moreover, street-level bureaucrats should undertake to develop techniques to educate clients toward making better judgments about seeking service and better assessments of service provision. Studies and observations concluding that clients are overwhelmed by professionals caution us about involving clients in decision making, but they do not reflect experiences in which client involvement has been systematically nurtured.

Client contributions would be enhanced if street-level units accepted responsibility for group case loads rather than incorporating clients as the case loads of individual workers. In many street-level bureaucracies, a primary contribution to workers' isolation and pressure is the fact that workers are individually positioned to be fully responsible for clients, are unable to seek assistance or advice, and must compete with other workers for advantage so as to minimize their load. So long as street-level workers are individually responsible for their sector of client services they are likely to be defensive in developing cooperative and supportive relations with fellow workers or clients. Without abandoning the efficiencies of specialization or the accountability that individual case loads minimally provide, it is possible to develop conceptions of group or office case loads that make clients the responsibility of the staff, not individual workers.

A second requirement in sustaining the new street-level bureaucracy is the zeal and leadership of people committed to the new orientation. Reform orientations are not self-implementing. They can only survive in a context in which people are dedicated to public service and receive support from client groups, fellow workers, and the community. The nurturing of such leaders is a process that would well begin in the training grounds of universities, where relatively visionary orientations are sometimes rewarded, and would continue through a public policy that valued such leaders for their commitment to a client-oriented service. Without the development of such a reward structure it would be reasonable to conclude that there was no constituency for these reforms.

Traditionally universities have provided strategic sanctuary for some of the most important dissenters from contemporary practice, but they have often been rendered ineffective because their lessons come from the ivy tower rather than from the streets. This is particularly regrettable because such teachers may inspire young professionals to go into their work without experiencing the dilemmas of practice or helping to prepare the environment into which students insert themselves. The new street-level bureaucracies would be significantly assisted by policies in which supporters of this orientation circulate between the teaching of young professionals and the practice of public

service. Some of their teaching ought to be done not in universities but in the field, where there is opportunity for constant confrontation with the realities of practice.

A final aspect of support for maintaining the client orientation of street-level bureaucracy rests in the development of ongoing processes of supportive criticism and inquiry. Built into every week of practice should be opportunities to review individuals' work, share criticisms, and seek a collective capacity to improve performance. The orientation should be skeptical, for the objective of such sessions would be to resist where appropriate the early closure of possibilities that accompanies the inevitable routinization of practice.

What is called for is introducing a norm of inquiry into routine practice, to keep alive the potential of client services and contradict the neglect that results from ordinary inadvertence. At the same time, the staff would be more receptive to learning when the potential consequences were less grave and all staff were in tum the objects of attention. This general thesis assumes that people who are constantly engaged in planning for group practice, who have some control over their work processes, and who regard clients not as units to be processed but as people, will discover the rewards of doing a good job gratifying and renewing.

In recognition of the magnitude of the task I have framed this discussion in terms of building on the commitments of new professionals. But the reconstruction of street-level bureaucracies is unlikely to take place in the absence of a broad movement for social and economic justice. Precisely because reform of mass client processing involves more equitable distribution of services as public goods, valuing more highly the status of individuals in society, and challenging the control and mystification of public services, it is difficult to achieve and requires general political support. If street-level bureaucracies indeed play critical roles in the political structure, isolated reform efforts cannot plausibly be expected to bear the full weight of social change.

Current reform interests are fragmented among the three parties of the buffer relationship. They are divided among administrators who seek to improve efficiency and effectiveness through management tools; unions that seek improved working conditions but are constrained to protect job benefits; and clients and client interests that seek service improvements but lack legitimacy in policy arenas. The quality of street-level practice will change only when an effective coalition develops that harnesses public concerns for service costs and effectiveness, respects client involvement in service procedures, and recognizes the needs of the work place, where the fate of innovation will ultimately be decided. This is not likely to occur in this society of protected interests unless this social and political movement brings the priority of more humane service provision to the forefront of concern. If such concern is likely to be evident in the future it will be because place by place and issue by issue, people-effectively demand respect for themselves and their proper claims on government, while at the same time they are able to explore ways to support street-level bureaucracies in their struggle to do a decent job under adverse circumstances.