

Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services

By: Michael Lipsky



Presentation By: Wilson Wong

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What We Will Learn Today...

- Who and what are “Street-Level Bureaucrats”?
- What are they supposed to do? What can they really do?
- How they can do it and why?
- Examples

What Is A “Street-Level Bureaucrat”?

- Street-Level Bureaucrats
 - Front-line workers
 - Public service workers who face real world challenges
 - Have limited resources

- Street-Level Bureaucracy
 - Public service agencies made up of mostly street-level bureaucrats

Who Are Street-Level Bureaucrats?

- ❑ Doctors, Lawyers, Admission Clerks, Public Health Care workers, etc.
- ❑ Lipsky's Favorite Front-Line Workers?

Teachers and Police!!

State & Local Governments employ:

- 1980, 3.7 million teachers, 500,000+ police
- 2004, 6.2 million teachers, 1.04 million+ police

What Are They Supposed To Do?

□ Deliver Services:

- Implement—Decide the specific operation and execution of policies
- Follow—make sure the original statutory intent is intact
- Achieve—ensure organizational outcomes are reached

What They REALLY Can Do...

- Be CHOOSY to control the work situation...
 - Screen recipients
 - can change selection criteria and decide who can be clients
 - Advocate for select people
 - give “secret” advice
 - Decide how to give out resources
 - use referrals
 - Be discriminating about when to give out resources
 - establish long wait times
 - change the order of when people are given service

- ...ultimately they can change policy!

How Can They Do That?

□ Discretion

- Tasks require observation and judgments
- No formula for working with people

□ Interpretive Ability

- Policies are intentionally and vague
- No clear program goals

□ Loose Authority

- More power=less supervision
- Less oversight from management

Why Do They Do That?

□ Reactionary

- Conflict: demands of client vs. organizational goals
- Ration Resources
 - Not enough \$\$\$ or time
 - Work w/in limits of policy
- Nature of the Job
 - Situations are complex and not “cookie-cutter”
 - Speeding tickets
 - Teacher attention/affection
- Nature of the Client
 - Clients always want more...
 - Increase supply=increase demand
 - ‘If that person gets it, why can’t I?’
 - Need to minimize risk of disruption to routine

Example

□ VA Hospital

- VA Hospitals prohibited giving treatments on an out-patient basis.
- Pre-Bedcare (PBC) allowed doctors to treat veterans who were “expected” to be admitted, but were not
- Doctors fought VA rules, and treated patients through PBC
- After Ambulatory Health Care (AHC) allowed outpatient care, PBC dropped from 122 to 73 patients, while AHC received 148 patients.

Assessment of Lipsky's Arguments

- “Seminal”—Written in 1980
- Pessimistic
 - Street-Level Bureaucrats need to change policy to carry out their jobs
- Reactionary
 - What about proactive changes?
- Agrees w/Theodelou and Kofinis bottom-up approach (T& K, 2004)
 - Street-Level Bureaucrats can bargain, accommodate or manipulate policies to their liking
- Argues for Accountability

- My Reaction? I liked it, but could go further.

The End

- Summary—According to Lipsky
 - Street-Level Bureaucrats
 - Front-line workers who interact with people
 - Have broad discretionary and interpretive power
 - Reactive to preserve resources
 - Ultimate goal is to preserve the public service worker's role, while achieving some program accomplishment.

- Any Questions?